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THE SINGING SWORD

LIKE A FLASH OGIER TURNED AND SMOTE THE FIRST AND THEN THE OTHER.

THE SINGING SWORD

THE STORY OF SIR OGIER THE DANE

By MARK POWELL HYDE

This special edition is published by special arrangement with the publisher of the regular edition,
LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

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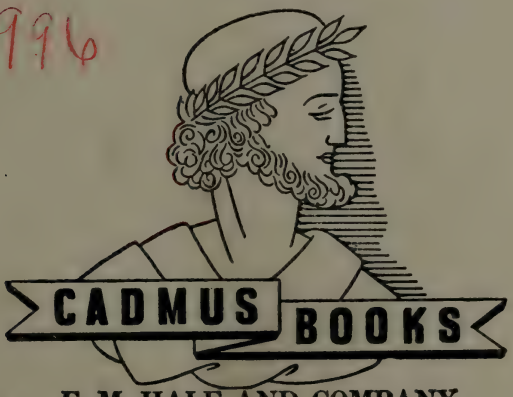

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FOREWORD

PERHAPS it is just as well that the historical facts concerning Charlemagne the Frank and the daring knights-errant whom he gathered about him are sufficiently meagre to have left the tellers of tales free to surround the Charlemagne era with the glamor of their own fanciful imaginings.

History teaches us to admire the great king and his followers, but the old tales induce real love and affection for those dauntless, restless, armor-clad fighting men. Frailties they no doubt possessed, but each one, hero and villain alike, was entrancingly bold. They loved adventures and found them at every turn.

Almost numberless are the songs and stories which cluster about Charlemagne, King of France and Emperor of the Roman Empire. Tales naturally twined themselves around his commanding figure — in fact dur-

ing a period of several hundred years practically all the tales devised gradually identified themselves as incidental to his brilliant reign.

Of these tales many of the best are concerned with the life and deeds of Sir Ogier the Dane — so many, in truth, that the following story chronicles hardly half of them. The Dane, indeed, lived long and eventfully. Following his marriage with a British princess, he became ruler of the British Isles, and at last when he was at the point of death, Morgana le Fay transported him to her enchanted and youth-renewing isle of Avalon. This last episode in his career is most engagingly chronicled by William Morris in a noble poem entitled "Ogier the Dane."

Sir Ogier has the distinction of being honored, even to this day, as a national hero in two lands, both of which are famed as mothers of valiant sons. The Danes call him Holger Danske; the French, Ogier le Danois.

He is further distinguished as the only one of the famous warrior-leaders of Charlemagne whom history authenticates as an actual character. There is reason to believe that a bold Dane really did take service under Charlemagne. It is also related that the two quarrelled, whereupon the Dane rebelled against the king. So far history and legend are in accord; beyond that what we know of Sir Ogier is of a legendary nature.

The companion knights of Sir Ogier are not mentioned in any known records, but nevertheless it is quite likely that the tales concerning them are derived from the exploits and characteristics of warriors who actually lived during the early medieval period. For example, there is considerable resemblance between the characters of Sir Roland, the legendary nephew of Charlemagne, and a certain Roland of Brittany who lived some time before Charlemagne.

But whatever their origins, the characters of Ogier, Oliver, Roland, Renaud, and others gradually emerge as definite personalities, each possessing individual peculiarities and each the central figure of many a knightly adventure.

M. P. H.

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THE SINGING SWORD

CHAPTER I

THE EVE OF THE BATTLE

NOT far from Rome, on the brow of a long height which formed one side of a green valley, Charlemagne, King of the Franks, sat scanning a Saracen host whose camp and defenses lined an opposing slope. All about the king stood the chiefs of the terrible Frankish iron men, so called not alone because of their iron courage, but also because they wore iron-colored war harness. The great frame of the King himself bore plain armor stained the color of iron. At either side and to the rear of Charlemagne the Christian warriors and camp-followers were hurriedly throwing up earthworks in preparation against an onset which they feared the paynim leader might sound at any time.

It hot haste had Charlemagne led hither into Italy his ever-victorious battalions. The Pope in terror had warned him that Rome, the Eternal City, lay under

threat of capture by Corsuble, a famed king and captain of Islam.

And now in the dim distance the French could descry the palace-crowned hills of Rome, but they had come too late to save the sacred city from defilement, for the Saracens had already stormed and taken it. At that moment Rome's lofty churches were being used as infidel mosques. Only that narrow valley, cut by a shallow, glittering stream, lay between the Christian array and the countless myrmidons of Mohammed. Along the banks of that little river and far back from it stretched the enemy tents and shelters. Against the soft brown of freshly thrown-up earthworks, running before and athwart the vast camp, flamed crimson, purple, emerald and saffron pavilions of the Moslem chiefs. Swiftly, hither and thither, flashed the arms and trappings of riders, for the coming of the Franks had set the place astir.

The glance of Charlemagne, after sweeping the teeming concourse before him, dwelt at last on the enemy's right wing. There he saw what brought to his martial eye a light of unwilling admiration. There in the lanes formed by trim orderly rows of tents the paynim soldiers were going unconfusedly about their tasks.

THE KING'S GLANCE DWELT ON THE ENEMY'S RIGHT WING.

"The forces of Caraheu, the Indian Prince, form their right wing," said Charlemagne. "A young commander is Caraheu, nathless fame bespeaks him wise and valiant."

In thoughtful, musing tones he continued, "Three they be to one of us. Never before, methinks, have we faced such odds in a foe so valiant, so well-skilled in war, and with a leader so wise as Corsuble. Happen they to best us, then all Christendom will lie at their mercy. Contrariwise, if we drive them from this field, they then can retire to defy us from the walls of Rome."

Quoth Duke Naymes of Bavaria, a wise warrior and one greatly trusted of Charlemagne, "Their ships lie at Ostia . . . "

"Ay, I know thy thought . . . A blow at Ostia the port of Rome . . . A threat aimed at their last line of retreat. It shall be done."

"Think you, Sire, they will attack to-day?"

"Nay, I cannot believe it. To-morrow perhaps they may fall upon us — otherwise I shall strike at them, despite they be so many."

But even as he was speaking these words a long, even array of horsemen suddenly formed before the enemy camp and fleetly poured down to the stream flowing through the valley. Into it their horses plunged amidst

foam and spray. Up the bank and straight at the host of Charlemagne they came, crying out defiance in a fierce, weird chant. Men of the desert they were, armed with javelins, bows and slender lances. Thin white robes flapped about them as their swift, clean-limbed steeds sped on.

The Frankish lords clutched lance and sword hilt and looked to the great King for some command. He, however, stayed them.

"They come to taunt us — not to fight. Wait," he said.

So the Franks remained grimly quiet, while the desert men rode along their front and hurled at them all manner of insults. But they kept carefully beyond bowshot, until suddenly wheeling they returned whence they had come.

A loud clatter of falling iron now rang out behind the King, and following the clangor there burst forth a storm of oaths and abuse. Smiling, Charlemagne turned to where a blackguard, to wit, a pot-blackened menial of an army cook, had clumsily allowed his pots to fall from the mule he was unloading, thus bringing down upon himself the reproaches of his superior, a cook.

"Let us seek food," said the amused King, turning toward a pavilion which had just been erected.

Soon he and his peers were at table, and whiles sitting

there, he was interrupted by certain of the squires, attached to the court, who came trooping boldly into his presence. Boys of sixteen and seventeen they mostly were, unarmed and clothed all alike in green jerkins and tight-fighting purple small clothes. Anxiously but with little ceremony they knelt to the great King.

"Sire," spoke one of the squires named Roland, "we beseech you to permit us, who kneel here, to play a part in the coming battle."

"Nay." Charlemagne smiled affectionately upon the kneeling youths even though he denied their petition. "Nay, ye are only boys. It were witless to nip buds ere they flower."

"But, Sire," pleaded Oliver, another of the squires, "at least permit us to don armor to defend ourselves if set upon. Else must we place all dependence for safety upon flight."

"Nay, Oliver," returned the King patiently, for he and nearly all other men loved Oliver, so gentle was the youth at all times. "I know too well that were arms to hand, ye would use them whether set upon or no."

"But I, Sire?" Ogier, a Danish squire it was who interrupted and spoke thus eagerly. "I am a year more old and greater grown than these others. Surely I might well give and take some of the blows to be struck."

For an instant Charlemagne looked admiringly at the fair proportions of the lad from Denmark, but soon his brow clouded. The youth recalled to him memories which stirred his anger.

"Stay thou with the other squires," quoth the King sharply.

"Ay," broke in a sneering voice.

All present turned uneasily toward the latest speaker, Prince Charlot, eldest son to Charlemagne.

"Ay," continued Charlot, "remain ye with the other boys. How shall we know that such paltry blows as ye might strike would not fall on Christian rather than on Moslem — in the hurly-burly of battle?"

The lords, attendant on the King, looked at one another in shame and dismay, following these words of wanton insult. More than once the malice of Charlot, heir to the throne, had resulted in great evils. They rightly feared that sometime Charlot would stir up such mischief as would perhaps distress a whole empire.

Ogier, however, after a swift glance of hate at the sneering prince, resolutely kept his eyes on the ground until he and his discomfited comrades had bowed themselves from the King's presence.

With the other squires he now strode along, staring

straight before him, fierce resentment glowing in his eyes. It seemed to him that he had become the butt of every misfortune. Suddenly he felt a friendly hand on his shoulder and looked into the sympathetic, brown eyes of Oliver.

"Take no account of Charlot," said Oliver. "All men, save perchance the King, know how base the prince is."

Roland, too, came and spoke kindly to Ogier, and others of the squires addressed him friendlywise. But though they spoke cheeringly to the Dane, they could not but be uneasy concerning him, for he had come amongst them, not in the usual way but as a hostage to insure the good behaviour of his father, Geoffroy, Duke of the Danes — Duke Geoffroy the Franks named him, but Geoffroy styled himself King of Denmark.

From the moment of his birth Ogier had been unfortunate, for his coming into the world had spelled the death of his mother. Soon afterwards Duke Geoffroy took to himself another wife, an evil woman, to whom a son had been born. This son she plotted to make King of Denmark.

Now at that time Denmark, like many another outlying state within the Frankish empire, was only partly independent. The Duke owed allegiance to King Charlemagne which must be acknowledged each year

by a fixed sum of money sent to Paris as tribute. But inasmuch as the sum total of the tribute remained merely nominal in amount, it was an avowal of dependence rather than a burdensome tax. However, in addition to tribute, such vassal states as Denmark might, in times of national stress, be called upon for soldiers to swell the Frankish armies. In exchange the vassal received from Charlemagne assurance of protection against foreign invaders, that is, assurance that within his own domains he might rule unmolested.

The first step in the plan of Duke Geoffroy's second wife was to poison her husband's mind with suspicions concerning Ogier, his elder son and rightful heir. This accomplished, she induced the Duke to revolt against the authority of Charlemagne.

Thereupon the King, though sorely angered, sent a peaceable embassy to Denmark to learn the cause of this unlooked for rebellion and with fair words to demand his lawful tribute. Duke Geoffroy, however, scouted all commands and even maltreated the Frankish ambassadors.

Then the king sent an army which so awed Geoffroy that he swore to remain loyal thereafter and offered, at the suggestion of his wife, as assurance of his good faith, his elder son, Ogier, to be held as hostage by the Franks.

Thus was accomplished the second step in the plot of the Danish duchess.

With the departure of the French army, however, the duke forgot all promises and again became rebellious. Nor was he seemingly at all concerned by the fact that in so doing he threatened the life of his son; for in accordance with the custom of the times it was lawful to put hostages to death when those whose good faith they insured played false. Thus the step-mother believed she had brought to fulfilment the third and final step toward Ogier's destruction.

Fortunately Ogier had found a powerful protector who had managed to save him from the wrath of the King. This friend was Duke Naymes of Bavaria, the one adviser at the court who had the most influence over Charlemagne. More than once, however, Ogier's life had hung by a thread, so incensed had the King become at times because of the treacheries of Geoffroy.

To have escaped death was, of course, a cause for thankfulness, but at times Ogier's lot seemed so distressing to him that he wished he might never have been born. In Denmark he had endured the malice of his stepmother and later the harsh cruelty of a suspicious father who had surrounded him, not with well-wishers but with hard task-masters who treated him with cruel

contempt. Again, at the court of the Franks, all men had looked askance at the son of Geoffroy of Denmark. Gradually he had grown to expect disdain and suspicion from every one — every one except his fellow squires and old Duke Naymes. Even in these good friends he confided but little. Rather, he sought solitude where he could dream of doing great deeds and thereby cause men to respect him despite his ignoble sire. Of such dreams had been born the idea of obtaining permission to fight in the coming battle with the Saracens. If he could but distinguish himself by performing some especially honorable feat of arms, perhaps his associates would become friendly. Perhaps he himself would become lighthearted like the other squires. Charlemagne's refusal had been a sad blow.

So for a time after leaving the King, Ogier hated Prince Charlot, but the hatred did not continue, for in his heart the young Dane believed that the prince, like the others, mocked him because of the treacheries of Duke Geoffroy. Had he been less modest, however, he would have realized that Charlot's animosity was due to another cause — to jealousy. For Charlot was a vain man, one who constantly desired praise. He therefore was envious of Ogier's beauty and strength which in all warlike games and manly sports gave the Dane

preëminence among the youth at the French court. This distinction Charlot could not forgive.

"When the rest of ye came in to the presence of the King," now spoke up one of the younger squires, "I had been in attendance on him and thus heard his talk and that of his captains. Methinks never before have such heavy doubts assailed Charlemagne. Here on this field is gathered nigh all his power, and feeble enough it seems when confronted with the paynim host. King Corsuble hath boasted that he will join in wedlock Gloriande, his daughter, to Caraheu, the Indian Prince, — and that Caraheu shall later, at Paris, reign as King of France."

"Get ye all to laboring on the defenses!" cried a knight, as he galloped up and brought his horse to a sharp halt.

Peevishly but none the less promptly, the boys found implements for the work and began to dig.

"We asked for swords and armor," grumbled Roland, "and we are given shovels."

CHAPTER II

THE SQUIRES WIN GOLDEN SPURS

THAT night the warriors of Charlemagne slept soundly until morn, but the squires, blackguards, and all of those not of the regular fighting forces worked far into the night strengthening the position of the Franks. Scarcely had the weary lads lain themselves down to sleep when day broke. They rose sleepily, but soon all weariness was forgotton in the excitement caused by a rumor that Charlemagne willed to do battle, though he hoped to receive an attack rather than to sound it.

As closely as they dared the squires approached the mound whereon Charlemagne sat his horse. A stream of scouts and spies continued to pass to and from him while he gazed in the brightening light at the movements of the enemy.

"Methinks we shall straightway see the beginning,"

cried Oliver excitedly. "See! Sir Allory comes!" He pointed to a knight in flaming orange-red armor who bore aloft on a gilded lance a gold-red, many-pointed banner.

Sir Allory was he who that day was to carry the Oriflamme of France — the battle standard of Charlemagne. He drew up to a stand a little behind the King. His presence there meant battle. Like a torch in the night he gleamed against the grim, brown armor of the iron men. Sir Allory purposely wore bright colors that he might be conspicuous — he and his Oriflamme.

A cheer followed upon the arrival of Sir Allory, although in the minds of the Franks and, perchance too, in the hearts of their Italian allies, reposed some doubts concerning the wisdom of the choice of Sir Allory as battle-standard bearer. A Lombard he was and the greatest nobleman among all those Italians who before the battle had begged of Charlemagne that one of them might be honored by being appointed to the post of greatest danger. This request the King had granted, whereupon Sir Allory had claimed the position by right of his high rank. To many he seemed somewhat untried for a place which on a day of battle was second in importance only to that of the King himself.

"Would I were Sir Allory!" cried Roland passion-

ately. A flaming spirit burned in Roland, one that ever drove him to attempt exploits greater than other men's. As youth and man he never knew rest from that relentless spirit, but because of it as time went on he did deeds at which men still marvel.

And now arose the sharp cries of captains, for the Saracens were coming on in great array from their center where King Corsuble commanded. Across the stream they foamed and now the iron men and the Italian knights thundered to meet them. On the plain, beside the river, the two hosts crashed and at first the paynims gave way a little. A great shout went up from the French. A second infidel line, however, came on and held. The conflict swayed doubtfully, and in the thick of it fought Charlemagne. Before him and his knights the foe gave back until the King and his immediate companions reached like a spearhead far into the enemy's ranks. There at last they came to a stand, for those on their flanks had not kept pace with them. Like a rocky headland standing out into a turbulent sea, fought the King and his knights.

Taut of muscle, Ogier sat his horse, watching the mighty spectacle. A strong hand gripped his arm. "See!" shouted Oliver. "The riders of Caraheu!"

Turning, Ogier saw what seemed to be the firm earth

moving swiftly upon the left wing of the French — so countless and closely arrayed were the troops of the Indian Prince. Along its whole length they struck the French left, some even making way around its end. Into the defences they smashed and spread confusion among the Christians.

Aghast, the squires saw the gold and purple armor of Sir Caraheu resistlessly leading the way. He clove a path through the French warriors until his great Damascus blade dripped with red. At length he stood triumphantly on a French rampart. There he paused to look about and, seeing how successfully his followers were fighting, gathered about him a doughty band and pressed toward the position of Charlemagne.

Now in so doing Caraheu met with strong opposition from the Italians, yet slowly his terrific onslaught drove them back, although they retired in the manner of men who fight to the death. No aid now could the Italians offer to the hard pressed King, nor did the Franks on his right render him any succor.

A groan of despair suddenly rose from the squires, for they saw Sir Allory giving back as in flight. More and more swiftly he retreated and finally broke headlong to the rear. Yet the squires again found courage for Sir Allory once more plunged into the fray where

the Italians fought. Again, however, despair gripped them. Sir Allory seemed to be shouting warnings to his countrymen. Once more he was retreating, now flying incontinently as if for his life. The Italians thereupon became confused and began to give way as dismayed men do.

Rigidly and speechlessly, Ogier the Dane had been watching from his saddle, but when at last he could no longer doubt that Sir Allory was truly fleeing, he lept from his horse, seized an iron bar which chanced to lie near him, vaulted back to his saddle, and spurred like the wind to intercept the fleeing bearer of the Oriflamme. His astonished fellow squires followed to see what he would do.

Nearer and nearer to Sir Allory drew the Danish squire until he rode by his side. Suddenly he smote the recreant knight with his iron bar. Like a dead man the Lombard fell, but he came to earth hardly sooner than Ogier, who lept down and began to tear from the fallen knight his red helm and hauberk. The wondering squires gathered round.

"Strip him and on me bind his armor!" commanded Ogier so fiercely that the youths promptly dismounted to help him arm.

In a marvellously short time Sir Allory's armor was

laced and buckled on Ogier. The Dane sprang to horse, waving the Oriflamme. Battle-axe in hand, he spurred back whence Sir Allory had come, and with his appearance courage returned to the French who saw their standard breasting its way toward where the King fought.

Facing fearful odds the Paladins of France and the King had managed so far to stand their ground, but of a sudden two Saracen knights ran simultaneously upon Charlemagne and tumbled him with their lances. Down beside him lept the Saracens to make him prisoner. And in this they surely would have succeeded, had not the axe of Ogier fallen twice and laid them low. Quickly the Dane caught a horse and mounted his King, who once more rallied his knights and boldly opposed the foe.

And now, there in the center, the tide of battle began to turn, for the iron men on both sides the King were pressing forward and wreaking havoc amongst the Moslems. Thereupon Ogier plowed his way into the ranks of the faltering Italians to whom the bravely waving Oriflamme gave heart and courage.

Then, after some time had passed, Ogier became aware of two knights steading him on left and right. Intrepidly had these two held to his sides, despite the fiercest onset of the foe. To them Ogier cried out thankfully, "More

than once have you two saved this banner and me. Better thanks shall ye have when the day is done."

Silently the two knights bowed that they had heard and steadfastly fought on. They had now drawn near the spot where Caraheu was fighting. Striving his mightiest, Ogier sought to meet the Indian Prince axe to sword, and Caraheu nowise avoided him, but in the press of men they could not come face to face.

At last Caraheu paused and saw how the Mussulmans were giving way in the center. The French right wing, too, was pushing back the Moslem left; wherefore the Indian Prince, a wise man of war, ordered the straightening of his lines. For a time Frank and Italian strove against Indian on equal terms, till of a sudden the main body of Caraheu's fighters wheeled and rode back across the stream. Behind them remained a thin, valiant line to cover the retreat, until like a flash this thin line also turned and rode back, leaving a gap betwixt the two hosts.

Nevertheless before these last doughty Indians crossed the stream, some few of them turned and singled out for combat the first of the Christians who raced in pursuit. One of the Indians thus wheeled directly in front of Ogier who made for him. But two Italian knights, forestalling Ogier, set upon the bold paynim, yet he smote

both of them from their horses. Then Ogier was upon him and disarmed him with a blow of his battle-axe. Once more rose the blood-stained axe.

"Will ye yield?" shouted the Dane.

"In sooth, why should I not?" replied the Saracen coolly. "I am disarmed; albeit had ye come alone another tale might have been told."

Ogier lowered his axe. The Indian's fearlessness pleased him. "I cannot deny that I took ye at a disadvantage — nathless thou shalt go to the rear and there await me."

"To whom," asked the Indian, "shall I say I have yielded me?"

"Ogier, the Dane, I am called — and thou, what is thy name?"

"Sadonne, a captain under Prince Caraheu and his kinsman."

"Sayest so?" exclaimed Ogier. "Then am I honored, since thy fame for valiancy is not unknown amongst us."

For a moment he reflected and then resumed, "I took thee unaware, following the onset of the knights thou didst succeed in o'ermatching, wherefore in disarming thee I have gained but little honor. Now, if thou wilt do my bidding, ye shall go free and ransomless."

"Say on," returned the Indian knight.

"Do thou thus. Seek Prince Caraheu and bear to him my challenge to trial by single combat which I would have take place to-morrow on yonder islet which lies in the river in plain sight of the armies. Consents Caraheu to meet me, then art thou free. Refuses he battle, thou must return as my prisoner."

Loudly laughed Sir Sadonne. "Free I am, e'en now. Caraheu not meet thee? Yea, he will meet thee or any other man. And when he does, Sir Ogier the Dane, look to thyself, look to thyself."

"Prithee make known to Prince Caraheu that I send my gage because I believe him to be the mightiest warrior of all Corsuble's host; else I had sent it to some other."

Up reared the horse of Sir Sadonne in turning; his master waved a hand and dashed across the stream.

And now was heard all along the French lines those trumpet notes which call the soldiers back to their defenses. The enemy, though nowise routed, was retreating. Their losses had been great, but great, too, were the breaches in the French lines, whence Charlemagne dared not hazard his thinned ranks among the good defenses where the paynims had taken stand.

A courier dashed up to Ogier and bade him attend Charlemagne in the royal tent.

"Come ye also," said Ogier to those two knights who had so well sustained him during the battle. "And I see certain others here who have this day manfully followed this banner I carry. Come we all to the King." Silently they all nodded assent.

Still maintaining silence the two knights and their companions followed and soon all were kneeling to the King, who with his own hands raised Ogier to his feet.

"Forgive me, noble Allory," spake Charlemagne with tears of gratitude in his eyes. "For a time I believed thee a coward. Rise now and ask of me any boon as reward for thy priceless achievements."

Then at last the knight who had stoutly held to Ogier's right hand found his voice.

"Allory, Sire? Here stands no such craven!"

Then the bold knight who had ridden on Ogier's left cried out, "Allory! That Allory should be hanged as a recreant. Look you!"

Both together the two loosened the straps on Ogier's helmet and lifted it from his head. And now when all stood spell-bound with surprise, none were more amazed than Ogier himself for he had recognized the voices of those two knights. With a quick motion he lifted the visor of one of them and looked into the haughty face of Roland. And when he lifted the other visor, the brown

eyes of Oliver smiled on him. Whereupon Roland and Oliver bared the faces of the other warriors who had come with them and each of them proved a squire. The boys glanced nervously about, wondering how their disobedience would be taken. But Charlemagne smiled away their uneasiness.

"The tide of battle changed by striplings!" laughed Duke Naymes.

When the laughter died away, the King turned to Ogier and addressed him in musing tones.

"Thou, Ogier the Dane. Thee have I more than once thought to put to death. Had I done so all Christendom would have suffered." He paused while his eyes grew kind. "To the craven Allory promised I any boon he might ask. I now retract that promise, but to thee, youth Ogier, make I a like one. Speak. What shall I confer upon thee?"

"Sire, dare I ask not one, but two?"

"Speak them."

"First, that the order of knighthood be bestowed on these my comrades and on me. Second, whereas I have been a hostage, I would be freed from that restraint and made your envoy to my father, Duke Geoffroy. Methinks I can so contrive as to smooth away the odds 'twixt you and him more cheaply than by trial of war,

the which I know you must attempt except my father change his ways."

"Truly," replied the King, "ye ask but little . . . "

The King's further words were stayed by the entrance into his presence of a tall, olive-skinned Saracen whose steady eyes revealed to all beholders that here was one who feared no man. Proudly he entered, his robe of monkish shape but of purple satin, richly broidered in many hues. On his head lay the folds of a blue turban in which jewels sparkled; a jewel-encrusted scimitar, more for display perchance than battle, hung at his waist. His short, pointed mustachios gleamed with oil. He bowed low to Charlemagne.

"Mighty Emperor of Christendom, 'tis Caraheu of India now greets you. In peace I come, seeking one amongst ye called Ogier the Dane." He straightened and looked to the King confidently.

"Prince Caraheu," quoth Charlemagne, "thy name and fame are known to all men. None here but honors thee. In truth such good will do I bear thee that if thou wilt consent to become a Christian, ye shall be welcomed amongst my lords as second to none."

"Sire, for thy praise I thank thee and in reply may avouch that, did ye but worship the True Prophet, no more devoted servant would be thine than Caraheu."

The King smiled and pointing said, "There stands Ogier the Dane. First, however, may I not learn the nature of thine errand with him?"

" 'Tis soon said. Oft before, Oh King of the Franks, have I desired to see and converse with thee and thy lords in friendly manner. Whence, upon receiving from Ogier the Dane his gage of battle, I came in person to accept it."

At these last words the King turned disquietedly to the Dane saying, "Ogier, I say in this ye have done ill. Are not the hazards of battle enough but that ye must jeopardize thy young life 'gainst this Indian Prince — he who wields Courtain, the terrible sword; he who is one of the world's mightiest?"

"Sire, we two in this day's battle failed to meet face to face, despite we tried to do so; therefore I sent my challenge. I prithee now make me knight that I may not fail him on the morrow."

"Nay, Sire," spake Prince Charlot. "Permit not this stripling, Danish hostage to thus blunder into greater matters than he dreams of. To-day he chanced to gain some honor by a trick and now thinks to find fame by humbling this princely guest of ours. Some better knight must meet Prince Caraheu, some seasoned warrior. I might well take the combat upon myself."

For a moment Charlemagne remained thoughtful,

while a wave of uneasiness and contempt passed through the French knights. Gladly would they have seen the malicious Charlot humbled at the hands of Caraheu, but they knew well enough that this would never come to pass, inasmuch as Charlot by some pretense would avoid actual combat and thus shame the Frankish arms. With downcast eyes the Franks awaited the King's reply.

"What say ye, Sire?" said Charlot.

"Sir," quoth Caraheu addressing Charlot contemptuously, "I came hither to accept the gage of Ogier the Dane. Him shall I meet or none. Howbeit," he continued still addressing the Prince, "whereas ye be so bent on combat I would nothing balk ye. My cousin, Sir Sadonne, I can promise will be blithe to meet thee. We four shall meet on that islet in the river, if your King permits."

Spake the King, "Ogier, approach and kneel before me, ye and thy graceless companion squires. Disobedient have ye all been this day but valiant. Henceforward shall ye all wear spurs of gold."

So Ogier knelt and became a knight, and so, too, Roland, Oliver, and the other squires.

Now of all those present the King alone failed to discern in the words of Charlot the malice and spite which prompted them. He looked fondly upon his son.

To the father's thinking, the Prince had spoken in bold, knightly fashion; strange to say he believed Charlot to be a great knight, a match for any man. Moreover Charlemagne seldom held in check the daring of his knights; rather he encouraged knightly exploits. Thus when all the squires had been knighted, he again courteously addressed Prince Caraheu.

"Sir Prince, if thy cousin, Sir Sadonne, would meet my son I shall not gainsay the encounter. On the morrow, if our armies do not engage, the two combats shall take place at the ninth hour in the sight of all."

The French lords glanced at one another. What evil would result from this they knew not, but each lord believed misfortune would come of it. Where Charlot went, ill will and treachery followed.

Caraheu once again bowed low. "Great Christian king," said he, "I thank ye for thy courteous reception. And to-morrow, if ye and King Corsuble do not renew the conflict, then shall my cousin meet thy son and I, Sir Ogier. Farewell."

Turning the Indian prince made his way outside where Ogier joined him to offer the courtesy of holding his stirrup. Diffidently the Dane addressed the noble Indian.

"Sir Prince, to-morrow we shall meet as foes, but if

neither the one nor the other be slain, I beg that nevermore may we meet save as friends."

Leaning downward in his saddle, Sir Caraheu held out his hand and replied, "Youth that ye be, Sir Ogier, on the morrow I shall need all my warrior's skill. But thereafter we shall live as friends."

Away then he galloped, Ogier watching admiringly until the Indian had splashed through the river.

"See!" cried an eager voice at his side.

Ogier turned to find Roland, now Sir Roland, holding out a gleaming blade — the sword Charlemagne had given him when dubbing him knight. With envious eyes Ogier saw wrought upon the beautiful weapon the name "Durandel" — Durandel, held by many to be without peer among weapons. Galan of Damascus, greatest of all smiths, had forged it and now Roland became its possessor by right of inheritance. His father, Sir Milon, had once worn it.

Drawing his own new blade, the one but just now given him by the King, Sir Ogier saw stamped upon it, "Bear Me Till Ye Find A Better." A noble sword it would have seemed to the young knight had not Roland's matchless weapon been there to dim its beauty.

"But," thought Ogier, "in all truth is Durandel without peer? Courtain, the sword of Caraheu, is reputed

second to none — Courtain, too, was forged by Galan."

And to-morrow he would fight Caraheu. By the laws of chivalry a defeated knight's arms must be given to the conqueror. Smiling now he said to the jubilant Roland, "When a better comes to my hand, then shall we compare blades."

CHAPTER III

THE COMBAT ON THE ISLE

THE next morning rose fair and warm. The opposing hosts rested quietly. Charlemagne had no wish to renew hostilities immediately because just before daybreak he had sent an expedition to threaten Ostia, the port of Rome, where the enemy ships were lying. Duke Naymes commanded this force which was to work what havoc it could on this the enemy line of retreat. Until Duke Naymes should report on his success, Charlemagne thought to remain inactive.

King Corsuble, too, desired to delay further conflict while awaiting the arrival of King Brunamont of Egypt who was hard at hand with formidable reinforcements. No warrior in all Islam was more feared than Brunamont, both for his own prowess and for the hardihood of his soldiers. With the aid of the Egyptian monarch, Corsuble felt that he would be invincible.

Sir Ogier and Prince Charlot, therefore, prepared themselves for combat and at nine rode together to the river and splashed their way over the shallows to the island, which lay open and grassy at one end, whereas at the other end there was a dark, thick wood fringed with brush. Caraheu and Sir Sadonne had already arrived.

Amongst the four of them Ogier's plain armor appeared somewhat barren and lifeless, inasmuch as the Indian knights wore priceless and glowing mail, wrought by the matchless metal-workers of Damascus, and Charlot had donned a rare suit of Milan craftsmanship, cunningly wrought and beautiful. Saffron and purple had the smiths of Damascus woven into their work, while Charlot's arms gleamed with many jewels.

However, when all is said, the arms of all four were much of a kind, due to ages of strife 'twixt Romans and Orientals wherein each took note of the other's weapons. Again, Rome had fought against Goth, Vandal and Frank, and each had found something in the arms of the other worthy to be copied. Finally, Frank had met with Saracen in Spain and France and on the roads to Jerusalem.

Hence the four knights on that islet were clad in long chain-mail hauberks which covered arms and body to

mid-thigh. Legs and feet, too, were mail clad. Their shields were variously shaped, but all were covered with bull's hide, the rims and centers being reinforced with steel plates. All carried swords, daggers and lances but, whereas the two Christians had axes hung to saddles, the Moslems bore heavy javelins which they were skilled in hurling. Alone, among all four, Charlot wore breast and back plates, which were then just coming into fashion.

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Ogier and Caraheu saluted, then turned and rode forty paces, each in opposite directions, ere they wheeled around face to face. They raised lances to signal their readiness to begin, lowered them to rest, and charged, while the hosts of both sides held their breaths and clenched their hands. Then the onlookers sighed, for each champion had caught the other's point on the armored center of his shield; the spears snapped, each knight, however, remaining firmly in his seat.

Their swords then lept from the sheaths and they began to hew at one another from the saddles. At the first blow Caraheu's sword, Courtain, cut a great cantle from Ogier's shield, while on his own shield the Prince caught the Dane's blade which barely left a scar on the marvellous metal of Damascus. Again and again they smote, until Ogier's shield had become bent and broken; a

cantle of his helm also had been swept away. Then his own sword met Courtain in mid-air. Not a nick did Courtain receive from the encounter, while Ogier's blade broke clean in two.

Then Ogier snatched his battle-axe and resistlessly crashed it down on Caraheu's helm. The Indian, however, parried it somewhat, wherefore it was the flat of the axe struck him headlong but unhurt from his horse.

Blithely Ogier lept down, but Caraheu rose suddenly, seized his javelin, and hurled it. Short then had been the battle, had not Ogier stooped to avoid the dart. As it was, the javelin pierced his shield, grazed his shoulder, and brought forth blood. Then it was axe against sword, Caraheu, swift and lithe, avoiding the heavy axe, while Courtain further cut to pieces Ogier's armor and here and there drew his blood.

Sad then seemed the plight of the Dane; his heart failed him somewhat to see of what scant avail was his axe's edge when it met the Damascus ware. So he decided to come to grips with the Saracen since he, although a youth, was mighty of limb, even greater indeed than Caraheu. So he prepared for a trial of strength wherein perchance he might batter the Prince to the ground with fists if need be and take from him his sword. Warily he sought the chance to close, when of a sudden

THEN IT WAS AXE AGAINST SWORD.

they two drew apart. A sharp cry of warning had reached their ears.

"Beware, Sir Ogier! Beware, Caraheu!" Looking up they saw Sir Sadonne riding towards them. He it was who had called out.

Now when Charlot had first saluted Sir Sadonne, he had objected to the nature of the field where they were then standing and proposed that they look for a smoother course. Hither and thither had Charlot ridden, with no place suiting him.

At first Sir Sadonne wondered and at length said sneeringly, "Methinks thou art parlous hard to please. Why should we not joust here where the field is fair?"

"Nay," answered Charlot, "the place is evil with badger holes. Howsomever, yonder I see a fair spot. Let us to it."

But when they came there, Charlot cried, "See!" and pointed to where Caraheu and Ogier were fighting. In truth Sir Sadonne then found a difficulty in tearing his eyes from that fierce encounter. For a moment he remained forgetful of his own affairs, but soon he turned to Charlot whom he observed, with surprise, to be looking at the woody end of the isle rather than at the fighting knights.

"Sir Prince," spake Sadonne, "let us fight at once or I shall name thee poltroon."

Thereat fear came to Charlot's eyes. Once more he looked toward the woods at the end of the isle.

Suddenly with a shout of, "Treason," he set spurs to his horse, plunged into the river, and escaped into the Frankish army.

Now seemingly for this flight Charlot could not be greatly blamed, inasmuch as out of the wood were pouring some two hundred swift lancemen of the Saracens who bore down upon Ogier and Caraheu.

Amazed and raging because of this treachery, Sir Sadonne sprang toward the battling knights, crying out his warning. And when he had come up to them, he lept down and stood with them ready to resist.

"So ye have betrayed me!" cried Ogier, more in sorrow than anger.

"Nay!" stormed Caraheu. "Naught know I of this foul deed! See! I stand with thee 'gainst them. So, too, is Sir Sadonne with us."

Boldly but to no avail, the three knights faced the riders. In an instant all three had been felled and were held to the ground by a wall of points. Hurriedly the lancers bound Ogier's limbs, threw him on a horse, and departed like the wind. Caraheu and Sadonne, almost

weeping with helpless rage, followed into the camp of Corsuble.

At first Ogier had blazed with anger at his rough treatment, but as he was carried along, he began to realize that now was a time to keep his wits about him rather than give way to wrath. So he calmed himself and therefore was able to observe, when they led him into the presence of Corsuble, that the King looked about in surprise until Dennemont, son of Corsuble, exclaimed in triumph.

"See, father, what I have caused to be dragged hither! There, bound, stands Ogier the Dane, the standard bearer; he who yesterday turned the tide of battle!"

"Then have ye done vilely," cried Caraheu furiously. "Ye have betrayed a noble knight and brought deathless shame upon me and thyself. I demand his release!"

"Stay thy haughty demands," quoth Corsuble darkening. At the same time he peremptorily commanded his guards to lead Ogier to prison. "Shall so fell a Christian dog escape? Nay, never more shall he turn tide of battle. To-morrow he hangs and no underling of mine, be he Prince of India or no, shall alter my purpose."

"Hold!" cried a woman's voice, and Gloriande, the stately, beautiful daughter of King Corsuble, stepped forth. "I pray he be freed. This act hath shamed my

affianced husband, Prince Caraheu, but none so much as my brother, Dennemont."

"Hold thy tongue, girl!" shouted Dennemont, rudely pushing aside the lovely damsel.

Maddened by the affront to his betrothed, Caraheu drew his sword and sprang toward Dennemont. Ere he could strike, however, Gloriande had caught and held him in her arms. "Go!" she whispered.

A sob shook Caraheu. "I go ere I do violence," he answered. "Comfort Ogier, an ye may." He rushed from King Corsuble's presence to his own tent where he sat brooding until Sir Sadonne had joined him.

"That false son of Charlemagne hath had a hand in this," spake Sir Sadonne and, in reply to Caraheu's questioning glance, he told how Charlot, with one excuse or another, had delayed the combat until the lancemen broke from the wood.

"My cousin," said Caraheu at last, "I foresee no honorable issue to this coil save that I deliver myself up as a prisoner to Charlemagne."

"Nay, ye must not. Charlemagne will hang thee if Corsuble hangs Ogier."

"Ay, mayhap I shall hang — a shameful end, but one to prove that I am no knave."

"That in sooth must I grant," returned Sadonne re-

luctantly, "and so I shall not deter thee. I, too, shall deliver me up to the mercy of the Frankish King."

Caraheu shook his head. "Here shall ye remain. And now take heed of my commands. The treasons of Dennemont and King Corsuble have released me from my allegiance to the latter. I will no longer aid him. Hence I command thee to prepare quietly my forces for speedy departure to Ostia where our ships lie. Await me, once ye have sailed, at the nearest port south from Ostia or until certain tidings of my death are brought."

Having spoken these words, Prince Caraheu without further ado mounted his horse and in full sight of both armies rode straight to the tent of Charlemagne to whom he unfolded his purpose in coming.

Charlemagne and his lords listened to his tale in pity and admiration, but all remained perplexed concerning Ogier's sore plight.

Gladly would the great King have done battle to release the Dane, but for the time he dared not. No word had yet come from Duke Naymes — nor could news from him be expected before the morrow — and on the success or failure of that expedition hinged the future strategy of Charlemagne.

"Sir Prince," quoth the King at last, "I wish ye had not come here. If Sir Ogier hangs, I shall be sore tempted

to hang thee, which were neither just nor Christian, for thou art guiltless. . . . Well, for the nonce make ye free in this camp. Until the morrow command me and mine as ye list."

Sadly Caraheu betook himself to a pavilion which was set aside for him and there waited despairingly. To him came Roland and Oliver with such words of cheer as they could muster, but the Indian Prince could not restrain tears when he thought upon the coming death of Ogier. Still more appalling than thoughts of Ogier, were his fears concerning Gloriande, his betrothed. He despaired of ever seeing her again.

CHAPTER IV

KING BRUNAMONT AND PRINCESS GLORIANDE

NO sooner had Caraheu rushed from Corsuble's presence than Princess Gloriande fled to her own pavilion, where she waited in dire suspense. She dreaded the coming of news, for she could not think the quarrel between her father and her lover would end otherwise than disastrously. Nor had she waited long when a slave came from Caraheu with word that the Prince was on his way to deliver himself up as prisoner to Charlemagne. In an agony of fear lest Prince Caraheu be slain to avenge the coming death of Ogier, the Princess wrung her hands and prayed to Allah and, as she prayed, she recalled the words of her betrothed who had bade her comfort the imprisoned Dane. Glad to find some occupation, she called her palanquin bearers and went to where Ogier lay.

Now it chanced that at the very moment when Glori-

ande made haste to Ogier's side, King Brunamont of Egypt entered the Saracen camp for the first time. Hearing a tumult in front, the Princess looked out of her palanquin and saw a gigantic, swarthy warrior riding at the head of black Numidian soldiers and dark-skinned Egyptians. She drew back hastily, but Brunamont had looked upon her with bold eyes.

"That radiant beauty? Who is she?" he demanded of one who rode near.

"'Tis the Princess Gloriande."

"Ah." Saying no more King Brunamont continued on his way and anon sat with Corsuble and Dennemont who had welcomed him handsomely — him and his hardy warriors. Hardly however had they greeted one another when an officer came to announce that Caraheu had surrendered himself to the Christians.

"A false traitor he is!" cried Dennemont, the treacherous son of Corsuble, despite he knew that Caraheu had gone as protest against the taking of Ogier and would no doubt die when Ogier hung.

Then King Brunamont spoke ardently. "On my way hither, I saw thy daughter, Princess Gloriande, and on the instant loved her. Now that Caraheu hath proved a traitor, I, Brunamont of Egypt, come as suitor for her hand."

"And thine shall she be," exclaimed King Corsuble and Dennemont.

"Summon Princess Gloriande hither," then cried Corsuble to a servant.

"My daughter," said he, when she had come, "this noble King of Egypt hath honored us by seeking thy hand in marriage. Prepare for the wedding no later than the eighth day hence."

The girl looked into the leering eyes of the huge Egyptian and loathed and feared him. Stoutly she replied.

"Nay, I shall not. To Prince Caraheu am I affianced. I love him and whiles he lives, will wed no other."

"Peace, girl! You shall do as I command. Now get you gone and presume not to gainsay me by word or deed."

With a glance of defiance at all of them, she turned and left the tent. But though outwardly defiant, she was in reality sorely frightened. To whom, she wondered, could she turn for help. Although a guarded prisoner seemed the least likely to be of present aid, nevertheless she hastened back to Ogier. He at least would be sympathetic. As she told him what had transpired, she noted that his eyes began to sparkle. At the end he spoke eagerly.

"Do not yet despair. The coming of Brunamont may perhaps prove to be our salvation. Him ye describe as proud and self-esteeming. Methinks I have heard of him as overly haughty concerning his prowess in single fight. Now if ye can play deftly enough on his pride, mayhap we shall all escape this coil.

"Here is a plan. Go ye boldly to thy father and defy him — but make sure that Brunamont, too, is there. Say to King Corsuble that ye will not wed Brunamont unless he overcomes a champion ye have chosen to fight in thy behalf. Then make mock of Brunamont — implying that he himself will scarce dare to meet the champion ye speak of. Say that, albeit thy champion is but a youth of nineteen, nathless he is more than equal to any Egyptian.

"Then if I mistake not," continued the Dane leaning excitedly toward her, "Brunamont will haughtily offer to meet thy champion, inasmuch as he believes himself matchless in fight and is ever desirous of flaunting his valor before all men. Thereupon he will demand the name of thy champion, and then shall ye reply that it is I, Ogier the Dane."

Gloriande's eyes now shone with such admiration for the young man before her that he trembled with pleasure. Gloriously fair she then seemed to Ogier. "Surely,"

thought he, "I have never beheld so sweet and brave a maid."

"Almost certainly," resumed the Dane, "will thy father attempt to prevent the combat. Hence ye must skillfully play thy part in rousing the pride of the Egyptian, so that he will oppose the will of Corsuble. Also, do not forget that I must have arms of the best. Demand of the kings that you be permitted to get arms from Charlemagne — albeit it is Caraheu's arms and Courtain that I wish to have. Canst thou accomplish all this?"

"If I cannot, then my wits are lesser than any peasant maid's." The princess fairly glowed with new-born courage. Ogier reached for her hand and kissed it. Again she seemed to him desirable beyond other women.

"Rightly have ye gauged the mind of Brunamont," cried she. "Him shall ye meet in fight and at that time shalt thou be clothed in Caraheu's mail and hold Courtain in thy hand. Allah guard thee. Brunamont is terrible."

Away then she hastened to Corsuble's tent where she found the two kings deep in talk concerning an attack on Charlemagne which they planned to make the next day.

"Sire," began Gloriande impudently, "I shall not wed King Brunamont until he overcomes in combat a champion I have chosen to stead me."

"Girl," replied Corsuble in perplexity, "what possesses thee to-day? Where is thy womanly meekness?"

Returned Gloriande mockingly to Brunamont, "Perchance this Egyptian king — I know nothing of his valor — does not care to meet my champion who in truth is a stout man, although but a youth of nineteen. Howbeit, if Sir Brunamont dares not encounter him, my champion stands ready to fight any other Egyptian chosen to stead his king."

Then her eyes sparkled, for Brunamont had sprung to his feet, hand on sword hilt.

King Corsuble raised his hand placatingly, "Nay, nay, Sir Brunamont, compose thyself." And then he demanded of Gloriande the name of her champion.

"Thy captive, Sir Ogier the Dane."

"He shall die ere sunset," cried Brunamont fiercely.

"Nay, nay," again interposed Corsuble. "Daughter, you amaze me. Have I not decreed that Ogier the Dane shall hang on the morrow? Hang he shall."

"He shall not!" clamored Brunamont. "He shall die under my hand in full sight of both armies — if such a place can be found."

"Such a place there is," answered the princess hastily. "The same isle whereon Ogier and Caraheu fought, when Caraheu cut in pieces the arms of the Dane."

BRUNAMONT HAD SPRUNG TO HIS FEET, HAND ON SWORD HILT.

"Ho," sneered the Egyptian. "Is he lesser than Caraheu? Then, forsooth, I shall reap little honor in humbling him. Mayhap I shall, after all, pit against him one of my knights."

"I advise ye to do so," said Gloriande smiling, "since Ogier, although young, is the mighty youth who yesterday turned the tide of battle against us. Moreover, Caraheu's arms were vastly better than his — nathless Ogier was not beaten by Caraheu. You will find it safer, Sir King of Egypt, to leave this combat to another."

Scowling, Brunamont turned to Corsuble. "How now can I do other than meet this Danish unbeliever? But doubt not that before I have stricken him thrice with my sword he shall be dead. . . . If in truth thou art a friend of mine, do not gainsay me this combat."

"Well, sobeit," replied Corsuble, fearing to offend his powerful ally. Moreover, the mighty proportions of Brunamont reassured him, for the Egyptian stood a head taller than Ogier. His massive muscles seemed ready to burst his armor.

"At present Sir Ogier hath no arms," broke in the princess. "I pray that I be allowed to find him arms. And, also, I demand that, should he overcome King Brunamont, he shall be given his liberty."

"Grant her requests, I beg of you," quoth Brunamont.

Corsuble nodded his consent and then said slowly to his daughter, "But one more condition shall enter into the matter. I doubt not that Sir Brunamont will slay the Dane and wed thee, but should he not, then shall Sir Ogier gain his freedom — and thy person. Ye shall be the Dane's to sell as a thrall to some other Christian or to make his own slave if it pleases him. I thy father shall cast thee out — shall give thee to the unbeliever and such shame as he shall contrive for thee."

Fear and doubt momentarily blanched Gloriande's cheeks, but she held her peace and departed.

Scarcely an hour afterwards, the messenger, whom the Princess had forthwith sent to Caraheu, returned with word that at the fifth hour after noon Sir Oliver and Sir Roland would come to the island, bearing with them the arms of Caraheu. There would Ogier be armed and mounted on a strong war-horse. Thereupon Gloriande sent word of the arrangements made to Brunamont. Wherefore it came about that a little before five o'clock the Egyptian king rode toward the appointed isle accompanied by two of his warriors. There he saw two Christian knights arming a third.

Corsuble also had been watching Ogier, and when the Dane had donned all his armor and had vaulted

to saddle, the Saracen commander felt a qualm of fear, for there to all appearance rode Caraheu, the mighty. Believing he had been somehow duped, Corsuble scowled darkly at his daughter. The outcome of the combat no longer seemed so certain.

Now when at last Ogier had finished arming and had laid his hand on the hilt of Courtain, the sword, his strength seemed to double. Triumphantly he looked to where his foe was advancing across the stream. He noted the gigantic stature of the Egyptian and his excellent horsemanship. The Dane's eyes then strayed from man to horse.

"Never," he exclaimed to Roland and Oliver, "have mine eyes beheld a charger so beautiful as him mine enemy rides."

Replied Oliver, "He rides Broiffort, a steed reported to be matchless in speed and courage and wit."

"Hark!" spake Ogier suddenly. "Hear you — Courtain is singing in his sheath!"

Thereat the other two laughed in derision, but Ogier plainly heard the sword vibrating forth a fiery song.

The four knights, accompanying the two champions, then chose a fair course for the fight and gave the signal. The combatants saluted and set spurs.

And then the Princess Gloriande, who sat watching,

closed her eyes; she dared not behold the seemingly certain downfall of Ogier before the onset of the huge Egyptian whose great bulk the horse Broiffort carried as lightly as a feather. Like a swallow Broiffort swooped toward the slower mount of the Dane.

Still dreading to look, Gloriande at last opened her eyes and saw the knights drawing swords, both seated in their saddles. Ogier, by a lithe body movement, had avoided Brunamont's lance. His own had broken harmlessly on his enemy's shield.

Brunamont, now rising in his stirrups, dashed forward and struck a terrible blow. As it fell he roared, "One!" He had boasted that Ogier would die ere he had stricken thrice.

But Courtain and the goodly shield of Caraheu — the work of Damascus smiths — had met the Egyptian's blade and abode the terrific stroke. Quick as an adder, Ogier thrust a mock stroke towards Brunamont's middle, thus drawing down his defense. Then swift as thought Courtain flashed on high and descended on the other's helm with such fearful might that the blade bit through steel and bone. Down tumbled the Egyptian giant — dead.

Who then wildly cheered but the Christians? The Moslems paled with dread and amazement. In truth

neither Saracen nor Frank had looked for so speedy an end to the combat.

Then hastily Ogier dismounted from his own horse, caught the bridle of Brunamont's splendid steed, Broiffort, and mounted him. The noble horse whinnied joyfully, and again Ogier made sure that he heard Courtain singing in his sheath.

"Look there!" cried Roland pointing.

Ogier looked and saw Princess Gloriande suddenly break from King Corsuble's side and fleetly, on her slim Arab barb, enter the river.

"And look there!" shouted Oliver, indicating the rear.

Roland and Ogier wheeled and stood spellbound. The entire French army had started forward as if to meet Gloriande, but as the line met her, it parted and she rode through to where Caraheu waited to gather her into his arms, — while the Frankish host, like a resistless flood, surged on toward the paynims.

CHAPTER V

ROLAND AND OGIER MATCH BLADES

IN this wise had come about Charlemagne's decision to make this sudden onslaught.

No sooner had Prince Caraheu surrendered himself than the French King began to suspect that the Indian Prince, having quarreled with Corsuble, had perhaps commanded his followers to withdraw from the Saracen Army. So thinking, the great King set a close watch on Caraheu's camp.

Soon his scouts began to report that, while outwardly little change was to be noted in the Indian wing, there was in fact a continuous trickle of deserters, while other activities pointed to preparations for an immediate retreat of the whole Indian army.

Moreover, much sooner than expected, good news had come from Duke Naymes' expedition to Ostia. The duke reported the burning of some of the enemy's

ships and the spreading of dismay along their line of retreat.

So Charlemagne quietly instructed his captains to make ready for an attack which should begin at the end of the combat betwixt Brunamont and Ogier — no matter who should win. The King had already concluded that Sir Sadonne would depart with the Indians during the excitement of the combat.

Of all these matters, however, Ogier and his two companions had no inkling. For a moment the charge of the Franks held them amazed, and then, as if impelled by the same thought, they galloped toward Corsuble and his lords, whom they came upon like a winter's blast. Ogier, hating his betrayer, cut his way to Dennemont and slew him, while Oliver cut down King Corsuble. And Roland, to his great glory, overthrew many of the Moslem lords.

A mighty victory for Christendom that battle before the walls of Rome proved to be. The Moslems, taken unawares, crumpled before the deadly charge of Charlemagne's well-ordered battalions.

Caraheu's troops, however, escaped to their ships; otherwise but a tithe of the great Moslem host gained Ostia and safety. In triumph the Christians entered the Eternal City amidst the rejoicings of the Roman folk.

Of the further deeds of Oliver, Roland and Ogier that day little need be said. They harried the retreating foe until twilight and then cleansed their blades of dust and blood and wended their way back to the camp beside the stream; Roland and Oliver, despite weariness, laughing and making merry until they noted that their comrade seemed sunk in sadness.

"Why do ye repine?" mocked Oliver. "Surely, this day hath proven prosperous to thee above all others. Either laugh, thou huge lump, or sing a hymn."

Smiling mournfully, Ogier drew the sword, Courtain. "I have come to love this sword," said he, "but it is Caraheu's. To him must it be returned. Almost I wish I had never swung the blade, so much do I now love it." Longingly he gazed at the bright length of the brand, whereon were stamped mystic oriental characters.

Roland drew near and held out Durandel beside Courtain, but Oliver kept his sword in its sheath. Later, Oliver, too, wore one of Galan's swords, "Hauteclaire", one of the noblest blades in the world, but not yet had he won it.

Held side by side, Durandel was seen to be longer than Courtain by a hand's breadth, but otherwise no better.

"Darest match Courtain's edge 'gainst Durandel's?" quoth Roland of a sudden.

"Ay," exclaimed Ogier, forgetting that he held Caraheu's weapon, not his own. Out he stretched Courtain whose edge Roland at once smote with Durandel. A shrewd blow he struck, yet with a certain caution. Anxiously the young knights examined the edges where the blades had met, but neither had marred the other.

"Now hold forth thy blade," said the Dane, and when Roland did so, Ogier so smote with Courtain that Durandel fell from Roland's grasp to the ground. Hastily Roland recovered it and saw upon its edge a tiny nick made by Courtain; and on Courtain's edge Ogier found a nick. Then the two became shamefaced, believing they had acted as boys rather than spurred and belted knights.

"Never more shall blade of mine cross thine," said Ogier to cover his embarrassment, and then all three exchanged hand grips and oaths of eternal peace among them. And those hastily spoken oaths were kept until death.

"At the least," said Ogier cheerfully, "I have this day won Broiffort, this peerless steed. Worth a kingdom he is — a thing of life and beauty, while a sword is lifeless save in its master's might." Yet even as he spoke, again he seemed to hear the sword singing in the sheath.

Of this, however, he made no mention, fearing his companions would mock him for a dreamer.

At last they gained the camp, and there Ogier found Caraheu, together with Gloriande, the lovely Princess. They greeted him warmly, but none the less Ogier seemed to detect a certain constraint in the manner of the Prince and Princess. Hand in hand they stood as if nervously laboring under some secret dread.

"Sir Ogier of Denmark," said the Princess at last, "thou hast to-day saved me from a hateful union with King Brunamont. Likewise hast thou preserved Prince Caraheu, for now Charlemagne will spare him. Hence I thank thee and now yield my person to thy grace, sith it was a condition of the combat that, should ye best Brunamont, I must be thine."

For a moment Ogier's heart lept. This fair girl his? He gazed on her loveliness and thought how wonderful it would be to have her always by his side. Fearfully Gloriande and Caraheu pressed each other's hands. Exultantly the Dane adressed her.

"Then come to me, sweet lady, sithen thou art mine."

In triumph Ogier stood awaiting her. Haltingly the lady moved toward him, holding forth a trembling hand. Out of a corner of his eye Ogier saw a deadly light beginning to burn in the eyes of Caraheu. Then he took Glori-

ande's delicate hand in his and led her to the prince, whose hand he also took and in it placed that of the princess.

"Her hand is mine, Prince of India, whence may I, by right, bestow it on whom I will. Take her hand and love her."

Almost swooning, Gloriande bowed her head to Caraheu's breast. The two knelt to Ogier, but he raised them hastily and would listen to none of their thanks. The good deed he had done had lightened his spirits, but now again the thought of Courtain came to mind. He began to unbuckle his sword belt.

"Friend Caraheu, I now return thy good weapon. It has served me well and I thank you. Thine other arms shall I return anon. For them, too, am I grateful." He tried to speak lightly, but when Caraheu reached for Courtain, Ogier could scarcely unlock his fingers from the hilt.

Joyously the Indian Prince drew the blade from the sheath, tossed it into the air, and caught it deftly.

"My lovely sword and friend," quoth he. "Once more art thou in my hand."

Then Caraheu drew himself up proudly. "Sir Ogier, ere we met in combat, well I know that thou didst dream a fair dream of overcoming me and making Courtain

thine. But overcome me thou didst not and perchance had not done so, had we fought to an end."

"True," replied Ogier, not a little astonished by the other's words and manner. "True, the blade remains thine."

Suddenly Caraheu put aside his prideful aspect and stood smiling friendlywise.

"No need hast thou further, noble Dane, to long for this lovely sword. For, whereas we proved equal in fight, thou hast this day altogether conquered me; to wit, by thy gentleness to this lady and thy good will to me." He extended Courtain, hilt first to Ogier whose eyes so swam that he could scarcely see.

"Take the sword. It is thine as is also the shield and the helmet and all that armor, once mine, which now thou wearest."

Hardly knowing what he did, Ogier seized the hilt. A mighty exaltation rose within him. Unable to contain himself he swung the blade in the air until it chanced to meet the central pole of the tent and cut it through. Laughing, the three struggled out of the fallen folds.

But Ogier sobered. How could he deprive a friend of so priceless a gift? He handed Courtain back to Caraheu, but the latter smilingly rejected it.

"Nay, keep it. In mine armory hangs many a Damas-

HE EXTENDED COURTAIN, HILT FIRST, TO OGIER.

cene brand nearly equal to Courtain. Doubt not that I still shall go well-weaponed and my arm shall be more strengthened by knowing thou art pleased than e'en by Courtain's hilt in my hand."

Thus in one memorable day Ogier won sword, horse, shield, helmet and hauberk, as good as any man's.

CHAPTER VI

TIDINGS FROM DENMARK

ON the next day Oliver, Roland, and Ogier escorted Caraheu and his Princess to a palace in Rome where Charlemagne was holding court. Wide-eyed the young knights stared at the huge works of the ancient Romans and the lofty churches of later periods. The streets were filled with soldiers and townsmen, each greeting the other friendlywise, all cheerfully employed in repairing the havoc wrought by the Saracens.

Charlemagne's palace, where it faced the street, they thought more imposing than beautiful, but inside they found it fair with marble and statues and flowers. In a great hall, wherein sparkled a fountain, the King sat receiving all comers. Good reason had Charlemagne to be in a gracious mood that day, for not alone had he once again triumphed over an enemy, but the Pope had offered to make him Emperor of the Roman Empire.

Most kindly he greeted Ogier and his companions and engaged them in pleasant talk. Once again he begged Caraheu to become a Christian, and again the Prince refused.

"I must return to India," said Caraheu. "Nathless, if I may, I shall sometime visit you at Paris and perchance ride the roads of France."

"Ye shall be welcome; both ye and thy beauteous Princess whom ye must bring with thee."

At that moment a French lord bowed to Charlemagne, saying that an ambassador from Duke Geoffroy of Denmark craved audience. Frowning, the King bade the ambassador enter.

"Sire," spake the Danish lord, kneeling, "Geoffroy of Denmark hath sent me to beseech your grace to succor Denmark. Her lands be overrun with pagan Saxons. She lies sore distressed."

The King replied grimly. "When naught threatens Geoffroy, then he refuses me all courtesy; e'en does he shamefully mistreat mine ambassadors. But when foes assail him, he comes as liegeman to beg mine aid."

The Danish envoy hung his head, not knowing what to reply, for the King had spoken no more than the truth. Sternly Charlemagne continued.

"Life and lands shall he forfeit ere I turn a hand in his

behoof." Whereupon he dismissed the envoy with a peremptory wave of his hand.

But Ogier, who had been intently listening, knelt at once before the King, crying, "Sire, now pay the second boon I craved, to wit, that I be permitted to return to Denmark."

"Good youth Ogier, I had expected ye would wish to go to thy father, forgetful of the wrongs he hath done thee . . . "

"And I, too, had expected it," interrupted Charlot, the Prince. "Take heed, my sire. Methinks that, if he be permitted to return to his native land, those rebellious marches will but harbor one more Dane to defy thee."

A hush fell upon the assembly. Ogier in his wrath dared not trust himself with speech. Strange it seemed to him that so goodly a man as the King should have brought to life so dastardly a son as Charlot. In truth a somewhat similar thought assailed the King, who wondered how Ogier could have been sired by Geoffroy.

Then, inasmuch as another suppliant to the throne awaited his turn to address the King, Ogier rose to withdraw, his eyes meanwhile growing wistful. Within the last two days he had realized great delights. His dream had come true: men were constantly seeking him out and gripping his hand, their eyes filled with good will.

But would this state endure while Charlot remained free to work his evil will — Charlot, supported by the blind love of his great father? In truth, so fond a parent was Charlemagne that he had nowise discovered in the speech of Charlot any suggestion of malice.

Said the King as the Dane was bowing himself away, "Nay, Charlot, thou art overly watchful of our weal. No cozener is Sir Ogier. Him I trust to compose the quarrels 'twixt me and Denmark."

Again he addressed Ogier. "Ye may go to Denmark — and success attend thee. Furthermore, thou mayst lead thirty of my knights with thee, if any can be found wishful to go. But thou thyself must find treasure to support them, for none of mine shall buy them food and shelter."

Having thanked the King, Ogier stepped back from the throne. A hand fell on his arm.

"Seek me this night, Sir Ogier." Ogier turned and saw that Sir Turpin, the valiant warrior-archbishop, had addressed him. "Certain matters of import need discussion 'twixt thee and me," continued Sir Turpin.

"Gladly shall I seek thee," replied the Dane, wondering what Sir Turpin had in mind.

Then Gloriande and Caraheu came to bid him farewell, each promising to leave no stone unturned to bring about future meetings.

CHAPTER VII

SIR TURPIN THE WARRIOR-PRIEST

WHEN darkness had fallen, Ogier sought Sir Turpin as the latter had requested. Out of the night he came into a noble chamber, well lighted with candles. At one end rose a dais on which rested a chair of state. The floor was made of porphyry and agate, curiously inlaid. A blue vaulted ceiling curved gracefully overhead, and on the walls had been painted pictures of ancient gods and goddesses, framed by colored marbles.

Sir Turpin, dressed in churchly habiliments, cleft hat on head, stood leaning over a great table littered with documents and, just at that moment, with rich spoil taken from the Saracens. This litter the priest fingered busily. The priestly garb sat strangely upon him, for Sir Turpin's face was thin and bronzed; a warrior he seemed despite his churchly attire.

"My purpose to-night," quoth the warrior-priest

after greeting the young Dane, "is to discover thy thoughts concerning certain matters. By the grace of God thine estate has now suddenly changed from that of hostage under sentence of death to that of one who stands high in the King's favor. We are pleased; we who have long befriended thee — and ye have more of such friends than thou wottest of. Nathless doubts cannot but assail us, now that thou art about to depart for Denmark.

"To speak briefly, if ye drive out the Saxons, will ye remain loyal to Charlemagne or declare thine independence and become King of Denmark?"

Taken unaware by these plain questions, Ogier did not reply for a moment.

"Thine answer?" said the Archbishop.

Now in truth the glamor of kingly power had often dazzled Ogier's imagination. Why should not he, like other men, cast out all thought of right and wrong and seize what came to his hand? More than once had he pondered upon what he should do, should he become powerful in Denmark.

"Never shall I become King of Denmark," he said at last. "If I have my will, my people shall remain leal to Charlemagne."

"Such words be welcome," said Sir Turpin, who had been keenly watching the young knight's face. "Yet I

would hear more. Why hast thou so decided? And will ye steadfastly adhere to that decision?"

" 'Tis thus I reason. No greater King hath lived, methinks, than Charlemagne. Long has he stood the bulwark of Christendom; where he holds firm sway, there the people prosper, whiles outside his domains petty kings rise and fall, bicker, and spread confusion. Under them the common folk groan in misery. If a hardy foe assails them, then must they scamper like sheep to Charlemagne's fold. Wrong should I be to oppose a power so mercifully wielded. Howbeit," he continued frowning, "should Charlemagne die, then might I cast off allegiance to the French."

Sir Turpin smiled.

"Nathless, sir," resumed Ogier hastily, "I would not lead thee to believe me free from longing for power and kingly pomp. In sooth I have dreamed such dreams. But I am resolved that when I wear a crown, it shall mark my sway o'er a domain mightier than Denmark."

Loud laughter burst from Sir Turpin. Ogier, wondering if he had been unduly boastful, flamed red.

"Domain mightier than Denmark?" chuckled the priest. "Ay, but erst there remains Denmark to be succored." Still smiling but more solemnly he resumed. "But if the Saxons be scattered, will ye then depose

thy father and thyself become Duke of the Danish marches?"

"Nay, my father shall remain Duke — in name at least."

"And thy stepmother? What of her?"

The lad brought together his lips decisively. "Honorably shall she live, albeit in some household far removed from the seat of government. There she may breed such dissention and petty strife as pleases her, but with the governance of the land shall she be naught concerned."

"And thy brother — to wit, thy half-brother Guyon? Mayhap to him will ye be merciful?"

"That shall I in all sooth! As a youth, he is innocent — and well I know how sharp may be the sufferings of an unloved boy."

"Ogier, lad, what ye say warms my heart toward thee. Count me thy steadfast friend as long as ye think to do no evil."

Having said this, Sir Turpin brought forth a heavy bag of gold. "This treasure is thine to use. Speak no thanks since I am no poor man, and to-day have I taken much of value from the Mussulmans. Furthermore, there is in the gift something other than mere good will to thyself, for I am vastly desirous that ye succeed in composing the differences 'twixt Denmark and Charle-

magne. That to me were worth far more than the value of these coins." After a pause he resumed.

"The King hath permitted thee to lead away thirty knights, the which I deem few enough, but for e'en thirty money is needed.

"And now I shall mention another matter which must be confided to none. Prince Charlot hates and envies thee, wherefore it were well that ye remain some while away from France. Also, Charlot looketh sourly upon Sir Roland and Sir Oliver, whom he also envies, though not perchance so bitterly as thyself. Toward Roland and Oliver will he make attempt to poison his father's mind if they remain at court to outshine him. The father of Sir Roland, as thou knowest, like the son, was fiery and quick to take offense. He married Charlemagne's sister against the royal command. This matter will Charlot recall to his father and contend that Roland, like his sire before him, is disobedient.

"Concerning Oliver, matters stand no better. Men love the good lad overly much to please Charlot, and in the past there hath been some little stir of ill will 'twixt Oliver's sire and the King. Wherefore I would that you three youths be seen but little at court these coming years. Charlot is evil now and always. Beware of him.

"And now as to Denmark. I tell thee the Saxons had

never gained foothold in the land save that she is divided 'gainst herself. False to their trust, have been thy father and his queen. And as the Duke has demeaned himself, so also have the great Danish nobles. Thy task is to unite the people, else will the Saxons enthrall them.

"So little in truth do I trust the great ones of Denmark that I shall hold Geoffroy's envoy in bondage for some while after thou hast gone, lest he go before thee and warn them of thy coming. So false are they who rule thy native land that should they learn of thy coming, they will incite the people against thee.

"Go now and bespeak Sir Oliver and Sir Roland that they make one with thee, and I shall beg the King that he oppose not their going."

CHAPTER VIII

PRINCESS CLARISSE OF BRITAIN

NOT many days after Sir Turpin had provided Ogier with the bag of gold, a long, low galley steadily clove its way through the choppy, sparkling blue waves of the Mediterranean Sea. Over its rails many knights were gazing eagerly forward. Their destination, the ancient port of Marsilia — or Marseilles as it is now called — had just been sighted. Chattering gaily the knights began to bring together their effects and to don their armor. From Ostia, round Corsica, had they slowly sailed until the voyage had become tedious and the few amusements afforded by the ship, very tiresome.

"There are old ruins," cried Oliver. "Methinks this seaport is older than Rome herself."

"Here ends the first stage on the long road to Denmark," said Ogier buoyantly. Little he cared for ruins.

His next words, however, were received somewhat

glumly by those who chanced to hear them. "When I have bought the mounts we need, we shall straightway ride on — perchance no later than to-morrow morning."

"May good fairies keep all horses out of thy reach for full seven days," laughed Roland. "Shall no respite from toil be allowed us? In this town I know some of the gentlefolk. Am I to be balked of renewing their acquaintance?"

"And that of their fair daughters?" added Ogier. "Yea, ye shall be balked, if I can arrange it . . . But in Denmark ye shall find fair maids."

The mariners now furled the sails and manned the long oars under whose impulses the galley moved through the narrow passage into the small, safe harbor, one side of which was lined with short, solid stone and timber quays to which were moored ships of war and commerce. A swarm of small boats busily darted hither and thither amidst the creaking of swaying booms and the exchange of shouts and curses.

As they drew up to the quay, the eyes of all those on Ogier's ship were drawn as if by magic to a long ship which seemed about to put to sea. On the deck, amid fair-haired warriors, stood a girl, and she it was that attracted the eyes of the young knights. To their delight they now observed that the girl and her companions were

also intently watching their own ship, and when they saw that it would land near at hand, the strangers hastily went ashore to await its mooring.

First to put foot on shore was Ogier, his thought being to greet the little lady before any of his comrades could do so, for to him she seemed lovely as a wood sprite. But the captain of the strangers, a gray-bearded warrior, accosted the Dane and asked whence he came and what he knew concerning the movements of Charlemagne.

Outwardly courteous, Ogier replied to the questions. Inwardly he felt discontented inasmuch as the little lady was now engaged in merry talk with his followers, and the more closely he observed her, the more winsome she seemed. Round her forehead was bound a blue ribbon; her gown fell long and white and was bound at the waist with a loose girdle of clinking silver links.

Roland and Oliver had blithely brushed by their commander and straightway addressed the girl, bowing low and displaying to her their courtliest manners. The other knights pressed behind them, their faces expressing pained surprise that Oliver and Roland should prove so remiss in the matter of presenting them all to the slender damsel.

It was Oliver, however, who most disquieted Ogier. That youth's brown eyes glowed softly as he addressed

to the fair girl his most adroit phrases. In truth, no man alive surpassed Oliver in his manner with a maid.

However, had Ogier been better versed in the ways of women, he would have been somewhat comforted, for then he would have seen her covertly glancing his way as if highly interested in his straight, towering figure, his boyish face, and sea-blue eyes.

Anon the old knight, who had accosted Ogier, led the Dane to the maiden and made them known to each other. Princess Clarisse she was, daughter of King Achar, a British monarch. And now she seemed so lovely to Ogier that he faltered in his speech. The beauty of the little princess daunted him; he made sure that she must be laughing to herself at his huge arms and hands and great height, whereas in reality the girl thought him gloriously tall and kingly. His diffidence she liked even better than Oliver's courtly, well-chosen words.

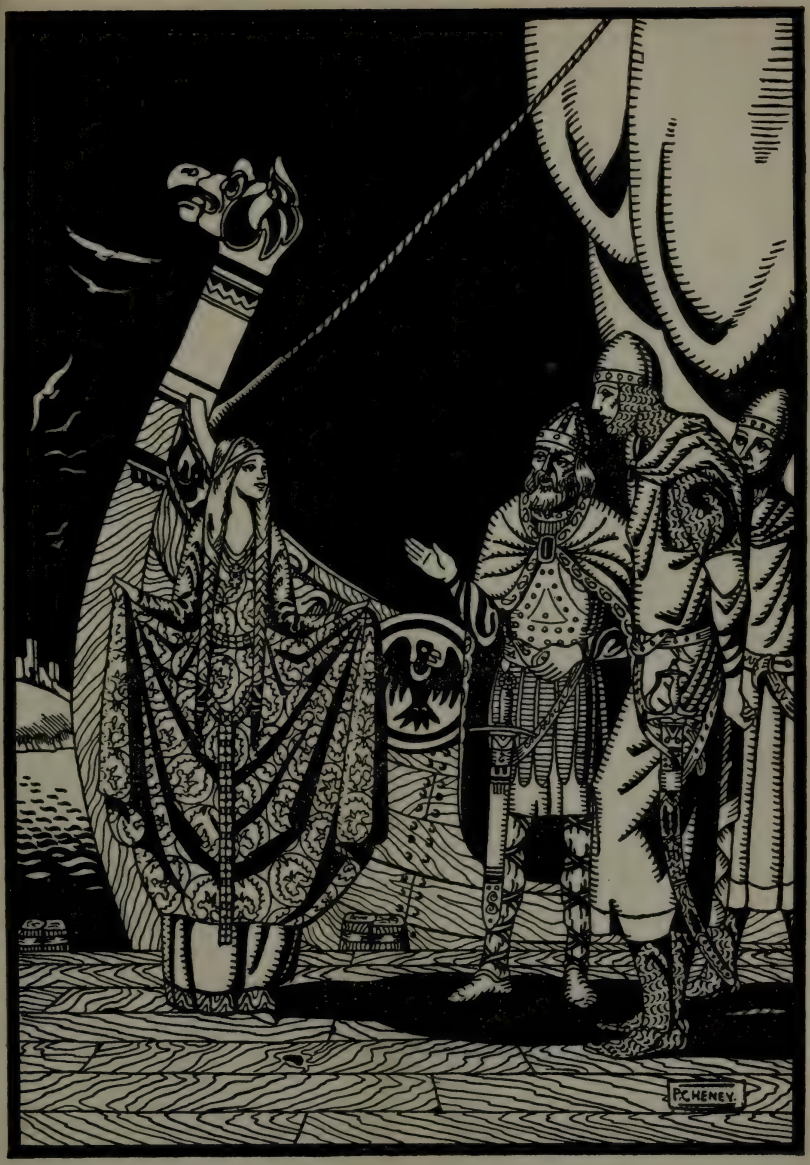
He tried to look and act the part of a bold captain of warriors but only succeeded in feeling like a doltish, bashful swain. Her delicate cheeks, her white teeth, her smile, her slender hands and tiny feet quite unmanned him and garbled his speech. When she turned on him the full force of friendly, childlike eyes, he could scarcely stand steadily, so great was his delight and wonder.

The tale of the British strangers was quickly told. Prince Rafe, son of King Achar of Britain, had been abducted some three years before and as yet no trace of him had been found. At the time of his disappearance he had been a child between three and four years old. The loss had driven the father almost mad and when all his searching had failed, he conceived the idea — as was common among the kinglets of that age — of appealing to Charlemagne for help. Thereupon he had sent this embassy to Paris to beg the great King to noise throughout his far-flung domains the tidings that a great reward would be paid to whomever should return Prince Rafe.

Princess Clarisse had gained permission to go with this embassy, not alone on her brother's account, but also because she naturally longed to behold the splendors of the Frankish court. Disappointed in not finding Charlemagne at Paris, the British embassy was now on its way to Rome.

Within an hour the Britons sailed away, but in that short hour Ogier had come to love the sweet British girl and she, him.

The thirty knights sadly watched the departing ship, while waving farewell and striving to catch the last flickers of the Princess' scarf. Like a cleansing flame had she come and burned from their minds all thoughts



ANON THE OLD KNIGHT MADE THEM KNOWN TO EACH OTHER.

of wooing the dark-eyed maids of Marseilles. They forgot even the pleasant coolness of the wine shops.

The tradesmen quickly supplied Ogier with horses, of which no more than five, besides Broiffort, had been brought with them from Ostia; and not a complaint was uttered when he hurried the knights that same day out of the walls of the town and on toward Paris.

CHAPTER IX

THE FOUR DEVILS

SMOOTH, broad highway, beside which lay many a compact hamlet and hospitable inn, led from Marseilles to Paris. Along its length Ogier's knights met numerous merchants carrying both costly and cumbersome stuffs, for Charlemagne protected traders by keeping the roads cleared of robbers.

A light-hearted company these young knights made. A friendly spirit prevailed among them, wherefore they called each other "lack-wits," "cringing whey-faces," "boorish, blundering yokels," and "butts for the mockeries of knights and ladies." They often remarked how unlovely was every other one's appearance and how mirth-provoking.

Ogier found it something of a problem to control these high-spirited followers without being harsh. They intended no harm, but at times became unduly

boisterous through sheer youthful exuberance. Were some serious task to be done, he knew they would give him ready obedience, but on this journey to Paris, where no stirring adventures were likely to be met with, they were inclined to grow unruly.

Sometimes for sport the band would descend full gallop upon some peaceful village, waving lances and swords and yelling ferociously a nonsensical war-cry such as *"Navets!"* which means turnips, or *"Jambonneau!"* which signifies *small ham*. Better sport was this for the knights than the villagers who either slunk within doors or scattered helter-skelter into the fields. Upon arriving at a village inn, the young warriors would throw themselves from their mounts and savagely surround the trembling host. At him they would scowl fiercely, and then one of the number would step close to the bewildered man and whisper threateningly, "Turnips!" or "Small ham!". Finally, with a roar of laughter they would surge into the hostel and pound the boards for meat and drink.

In general, it may be said, the old folks of the villages were sorry to see them come and the maidens and children, loath to have them go. They were generous with pennies and made good frolic; so the children thought them marvellously fine. And the girls sighed when they

rode away, for in all France there were no more comely young gentlemen than these.

In Paris, where their part in the victory at Rome had become known, the people hailed them with acclaim. Reports of their own individual exploits, however, had not yet reached the capital and this was somewhat disappointing; but the situation was gradually remedied as each one told of the fine deeds of his fellows. Each modestly refrained from mentioning what he himself had done, knowing very well that the others would do him full justice.

But Ogier soon forced them to leave the sparkling life at Paris. Again they followed a good highway, this one leading to a seaport in the Netherlands from which Ogier intended to embark for Denmark. This road they held to steadily until one day they found themselves no more than three days' journey from their seaport. Having come about mid-afternoon upon a good inn, they dismounted for the night.

Now when one has rubbed elbows with the same companions for a considerable time, he begins to tire of their company and welcomes an opportunity to escape them for a while. Also, one longs to go afoot after days of riding. So Ogier and many another knight that afternoon, alone or perhaps with one companion, walked

away from the bustle of the inn and entered the cool, open woods which stood all about.

Ogier himself went alone and was soon pleased to find his legs losing their riding stiffness. He began to enjoy the quiet countryside. Except for gently rising knolls here and there, the land lay flat; the fields of the peasants seemed rich and well tilled; cattle grazed in meadows along the banks of sluggish streams. Far and aimlessly wandered the Dane until of a sudden he became aware of having lost his way. This nowise disturbed him, however, because in the distance he could see a peasant's dwelling, and toward it he now bent his steps.

The wife and goodman whom he found there greeted him suspiciously at first, but upon finding him to be amicable, they answered his questions readily enough. They explained that he could easily find his way back to the inn by following a certain path. Then they invited him within. Strangers seldom came that way; hence they were anxious to hear the news of the world. Later, inasmuch as he spoke freely and friendlywise, they begged him to share with them their evening food. On the table the woman spread horns of fresh milk, baked fowl, and honey and bread.

Charlemagne's recent victory over Corsuble pleased

them greatly because they hoped he had taken so much spoil that he would reduce their taxes. Finally they confided to Ogier that, although they liked him, they frankly mistrusted soldiers. They even preferred thieves to soldiers, because thieves came singly or in twos or threes and could be resisted, while soldiers usually came in such large parties that they took whatever they wanted, sometimes paying, but more often not.

Darkness came on, and Ogier upon rising was further advised by the peasant concerning the path back to the inn. "It is too late," he urged, "to take the one first advised. There is another and better one," he explained, so earnestly as to arouse the knight's curiosity.

"Longer it is, but safe, which may not be said of the other, once night has fallen."

"And what danger besets the first path?" enquired the guest.

"Danger from evil spirits which haunt an old stronghold called Castle Gundrun. The first path wends anear that castle which now lies in ruin. Many a bloody tale is told of the masters of the old hold, and it is their ghosts which now roam the ruin. No man dares go near it after nightfall."

Ogier listened patiently to these kindly warnings and careful directions for reaching the inn by a safe path,

but when the young knight bade them farewell, he followed the way which would pass Castle Gundrun.

It should be said nevertheless that he went somewhat fearfully for he, like men of the time, could not altogether free himself from belief in the existence of ghosts, demons, elves, and the like. More than once the sighing of trees or the stirring of some night animal caused him to start apprehensively. Once he half drew his sword for no greater reason than the flutter of a roosting bird. Trees arched darkly above him. The night, however, was not so black but that he could follow the way; open spaces were grayly lighted by a pale moon, shining feebly through thin clouds.

Suddenly he emerged from the trees and beheld the haunted castle. From a knoll it frowned down upon meadows. More ancient it seemed than the very hill on which it stood; a thing apart from all surroundings, — a thing of another world, seeming as naturally hateful to men as a huge serpent.

His path now passed no great way from the black cavern formed by the arch of the castle entrance. Tremulously he stared at that black gateway and verily expected to see issue forth the fiends whom he made sure swarmed in that ruinous but still standing structure.

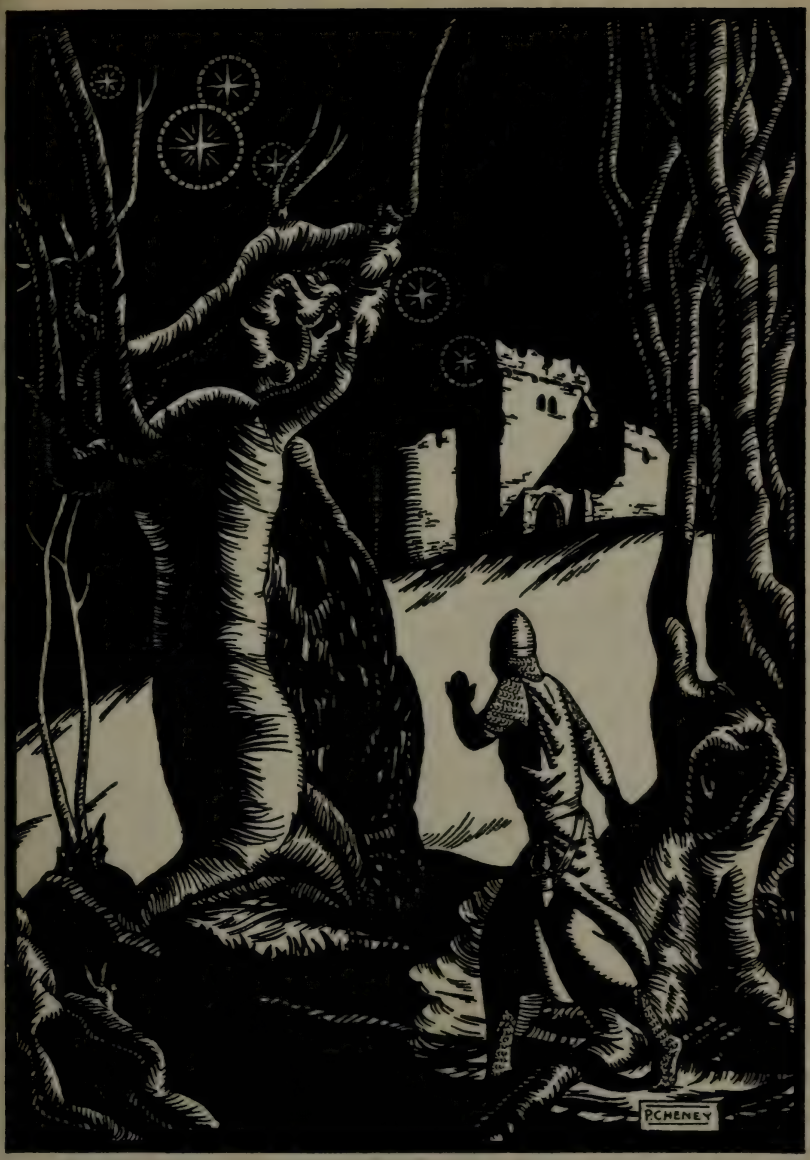
Suddenly he woke to find, to his shame, that he had

been so daunted by the ghastly spell of that venerable pile that he had left the path and was circling it, so that he might keep well away from the terrifying gateway. Chiding himself, he went back to the beaten path, but his knees quaked.

Then of a sudden his scalp crawled with horror; his hair seemed to stiffen. A faint light flashed in an upper window. Shivering with terror he stood transfixed in the gray moonlight until at length he forced himself to believe that such timorousness more befitted a yokel than a proven knight. Shame began to outweigh fear. What really had he seen? At first he had made no doubt but that it was the glow of a flitting ghost; but had not the color been overly red to be ghostly? Might it not have been the door of a lighted chamber quickly swung open and then shut?

So encouraging himself, he followed the path to the point nearest the yawning gateway. Then again he halted suddenly, this time nearly sinking to the ground with terror. A faint, agonized, unearthly wail came from an upper floor of that gray old castle.

Ogier shuddered. Should he not yield to the temptation to flee? Nobody was there to see. He hesitated, drew his sword and lurching like a drunken man, — entered the black arch.



SUDDENLY HE EMERGED AND BEHELD THE HAUNTED CASTLE.

Tread as warily as he might in the inky blackness, nevertheless he sometimes stumbled on scattered debris and raised a great din, or so it seemed to his over-excited faculties. In truth he made but little noise, for everywhere the dust of ages had gathered, deadening the sound of his progress.

Dreading what each moment might bring forth, he made toward a faint light which he knew to be the moon shining through windows and a cleft in a fallen wall into what he supposed to be the great hall. The sudden scurry of animal feet startled him so that he fell, and the clatter he made seemed to reverberate throughout the castle. Really the sound had been slight. A rat had frightened him, and he had stumbled against a flight of steps.

Up the steps he mounted and came out into the great hall. Here there was light sufficient for him to see a jumble of decaying furnishings scattered about. The sound of his chattering teeth angered him. He shut them forcibly, yet he kept turning nervously about because he suspected goblins to be in hiding, ready to leap upon his back. Gathering courage, he noted that most of the light came from a great gap in the wall.

Something ghostly fluttered past his ear. Again he cringed, but soon he realized that this must have been

a bat. In the far left corner he discerned a spiral stairway and up this he forced himself to mount as the wail he had heard had seemed to come from above.

And no sooner had he gained the upper floor than that horrifying wail again broke the silence. Then in truth did Ogier have great ado to keep himself from turning tail. Instead, he staggered toward the place whence the wail had come and saw a faint ribbon of light at the foot of a door. Gripping Courtain, he cautiously approached the door and heard within a terrible gasping such as a man agonized beyond endurance might utter. A low, cruel chuckle followed and then the murmur of voices, but the awful gasping continued.

These sounds, dreadful as they were, however, served to hearten Ogier. There was about them that which seemed more human than ghostly. So with all his weight he crashed his mailed heel against the door. Open the door burst, amidst the rending of iron and wood.

Before him four red devils stood, looking his way in horror. Each devil trailed a long tail; horns stood out from their foreheads. In their hands they held instruments of torture. On a rack was stretched a man whose visage was marked with such suffering as may not be described. In a corner cowered a small child who gibbered. The terror and misery written on the face of that

child wrested from Ogier the last particle of fear and displaced it with hate so terrible that the devils stood palsied before the fury of the man.

Then ere those devils could recover themselves, Ogier had sprung into the room and with four blows of Courtain had laid them low. And now he saw that this was no devil's work, unless one may say that men are sometimes devils. These were men; their tails and horns a disguise.

With his dagger Ogier quickly cut loose the man on the torture rack. Wild but stupid, the sufferer sat up and gazed unseeingly about until his eyes fell on the fallen devils. Then with a beastlike sound he snatched Courtain from Ogier and in an instant had thrust the devils through the throats. Thereupon he howled, either in anguish or triumph, and fell in a heap to the floor.

Whereupon the raving, filthy child in the corner, half walking, half crawling, shuffled toward the knight, and so awful and animal-like he seemed that Ogier at first shrunk from him in fear and disgust. Soon, however, he knew that the child was coming to him for protection, having dumbly sensed that here was one who intended no harm. On he came, moaning like a hurt dog.

Now because Ogier had suffered in his younger days he had a warmth of feeling for children. So despite his

disgust he caught up the miserable child and to his surprise saw him almost instantly fall asleep.

So great a silence now prevailed in the castle that the terror of it drove Ogier to escape from the horrible place. Sheathing Courtain, though he liked not to do so, he held the child under one arm, caught up the tortured man with the other and ran from the castle. Thus he carried the double burden until at last he staggered into his inn yard.

Wonderingly the knights crowded about him, and when Ogier had briefly described his adventure, Roland and others seized torches and hastened back to Castle Gundrun to learn what they could of its mystery. But they found no living man there, nor treasure, nor any other thing of interest save the torture chamber and the dead men in it. The strange attire of the four devils, however, caught Roland's fancy and he took their garments back with him. As it chanced they served a very useful purpose in no long time.

The tortured man they put to bed, washed and shaved him and called a woman, who claimed knowledge of healing simples, to attend his needs. Once he had been made clean, they saw that he was a young man, no more than twenty-five years old. His features and slender frame seemed those of a scholar. Haggard he was, but

more broken of spirit than body which, though scarred and burned, had received no large wounds, nor were any bones broken. Sometimes he would cringe and moan as if still surrounded by enemies. At last he fell into a sound sleep.

The child, too, had been driven nearly witless with terror and ill-treatment. The little face gleamed ghastly white in the candlelight, and he slept as if he would never waken. When he was washed, his starved, wasted limbs were found to be covered with sores, but the old woman attendant gave as her opinion that good care would restore him to health. He seemed a scant four years of age, although the old attendant gave as her opinion that he might be somewhat older.

On the morrow, fain as Ogier was to be on his way, he waited to make arrangements for man and child. The former had awakened with aching bones and joints, but so much better that his thoughts and memory had cleared. His name he gave as Clement Allair; his position, that of a country gentleman of slender means who lived quietly on his small farmstead, where he employed his leisure hours in writing rhymes and tales, such as minstrels tell or sing.

"In appearance," he said, "I chance to resemble the son of Lord Bracken, a rich Baron whose castle lies a

few leagues from my acres. One day while wandering near that castle, I — I went thither — I went . . . " He became confused and a spot of color came to his cheeks.

"A lady," whispered Oliver. "He went thither to find a lady."

"I chanced to walk a path near the castle of Baron Bracken," continued the poet, "when four men seized me, mistaking me for the great man's son. To the ruined castle was I led and there held for ransom. Vainly I protested it was no rich Baron's son they had taken but a poor poet. My statements were not believed. By torture they forced me to write, as son of the Baron, begging for money to be sent. I need not say that my letter remained unanswered. Thereupon my captors dressed themselves in devilish attire and again tortured me until I wrote once more. For a month I endured such agony as is unbearable to think upon; I longed for death."

Of the child, Clement Allair had no knowledge, save that he was always present during the fiendish work of torture.

Sir Oliver was the first to beg the poet to sing his songs and tell his tales, thinking thereby to beguile him from painful memories. So the poet sang, and his face became peaceful at length. The knights hung on his

words and melodies with delight, for in those days many knights had no knowledge of letters; books were rare things and mostly written in Latin, whence any singer of ballads or teller of tales came as a godsend. The warriors longed for Clement's continued company, but he was unfit for travel. So Ogier gave him money and bade the innkeeper take the greatest care of the poet.

The disposal of the child proved a far more difficult problem. The inn folk were loath to keep the boy, nor did Ogier like to entrust him to strangers. With great disquiet, but nevertheless flattered by it, he saw how trustingly the child's eyes followed him as he moved about. Whenever he left the room, the boy whimpered, and when he returned, the childish face lighted contentedly. Worriedly Ogier, Oliver and Roland discussed the knotty problem. Suddenly the child sensed that they might leave him; whereat the little white face twisted with dismay and he looked at them so piteously as to give them great discomfort.

Then Ogier caught him up fiercely in his arms, saying, "I shall take him with me!"

Loudly he ordered his knights to horse, but before departing, turned to bid farewell to Clement Allair.

"Should Denmark settle into peace, then must thou come to me at Elsinore."

"To do so," replied the poet, "were but to increase my debt to thee. Would I might better repay thy goodness!"

"With thy songs shalt thou repay me," quoth Ogier, clasping his hand.

Turn by turn the knights bore in their arms the emaciated child whose strength seemed to have altogether left him. Soon the bronzed young knights came to love him, so uncomplaining he was. That night they lodged in a wretched hostel, and when morning came the child was very sick. By his hot, flushed face they knew a fever was upon him.

In consternation the steel-clad warriors stood about in comical baffled perturbation wondering what to do.

Finally in despair Ogier again mounted his steed with the boy in his arms, and by good chance they soon came to a tiny, wayside village where in a little shop sat a kind-faced old dame. On her shelves Ogier saw garments for children and he entered to buy some, the old dame meanwhile smiling with amusement, for these formidable-appearing knights seemed distressed. But when she saw the sick boy, she cried out in sympathy and offered to wash and dress him in his new, clean clothes. To her his thin, sore-covered body proclaimed no more than that he had lacked good care. To his sores she applied salves and stated that he must be so tended each day and fed on

milder food than inn fare. For her attentions they were grateful, but her words did little to reassure them, since they doubted their abilities to minister to the child in the manner she recommended.

Then Oliver, in his endearing manner begged her with fair words and soft, brown eyes, while again explaining their luckless state, that she go with them as attendant to the child, whom they all had grown to love. Hard though she found it to resist Oliver's appeal, she shook her head.

"I may not go, sith I must attend home and shop for my goodman who labors in the fields."

"If I buy thy shop twice over, wilt thou come?" shouted Ogier.

"Nay, how might my goodman be left alone?"

"Thy goodman's acres shall I buy; he, too, then may come."

"Still I must refuse. This is our home. We be no longer young and care not to start life anew."

At this moment her husband, who had come in from the fields and had joined the group unnoticed, came forward. He had heard Ogier's offers of payment.

"Wife," said he, "if we can do aught . . . " He stopped to deliberate and meandered on in the exasperating manner of peasants. "A King's courier hath

passed this way. In the hostel I heard him tell of the battle 'gainst the Saracens. Most of all he praised Sir Ogier the Dane, but also Sir Oliver and Sir Roland — perchance others here. Now I see they be kindly knights as well as valorous — else why were this child's health of concern to them?" He paused again. The knights wished to cuff him, so provoking was he, nevertheless they dared not antagonize him.

"Methinks, wife, that, if ye go with them till another nurse for the child be found, I might make shift to attend shop and field. And whatever Sir Ogier will pay thee for thy service will be welcome, sithen we have none too much of money."

Joyfully Ogier seized the man's hand and filled it with gold and threw more before the dame. And each knight there threw down coins until the shop was alitter with money. The dame herself Oliver caught up and raised her on high, while they all cheered.

Straightway a palfrey was secured for the dame to ride; and for the child they purchased a mule whereon was strapped a huge basket. Within it was lined with bedding, and over it was erected a canopy to shade the boy's eyes from the sun. Merrily now the knights cast aside care and filled the air with songs and shouts of derision concerning each other's characters. Now and again one

of them would ride up to the child with little presents to please him.

The next day all fever had left the little waif. His mind and spirits began to blossom rapidly. He soon forgot his past miseries in the present possession of a kind nurse and thirty strong young men as servants. Should he point to a bright flower, that flower was soon in his hand, brought by an eager knight. Once an oriole flashed up and rested on a nearby tree. The boy reached for it and then looked about in hurt astonishment when nobody moved to get it. They hoped he would not demand the sun or moon. By the time their seaport had been gained, his wits had flowered amazingly.

From the port they sailed to Denmark's western shore, which the Saxons had not yet invaded, and there steered into a small fishing harbor.

CHAPTER X

BARON GELDHAR

ITH the approach of Ogier's ship the Danish fishing folk were thrown into a panic of fear. Madly they gathered valuables, herded together their cattle and children, and hastened to a fortified hilltop which lay a mile inland. Good cause had they to dread the coming of a strange ship.

Although Ogier had anticipated that the arrival of his ship might cause some such consternation, he greatly regretted what had happened. He had need of these Danish fishermen and therefore promptly set about dispelling their fears. He knew he must prove to their satisfaction that he and his men were neither Norse vikings nor Saxon pirates. So he tied a white flag to his lance and rode alone to the log-fenced height to which the fisher folk had fled. He approached with considerable misgivings — not that he feared attack, but

he was afraid lest he fail to gain the confidence of the simple people.

Would he succeed in ingratiating himself with them? His success in Denmark, as he well knew, would depend on gaining the confidence of just such folk as these. So he addressed them in his most conciliatory manner. He told them his name and rank and why he had come and offered to show proofs of the truth of his statements. He explained that he had come in peace — to beg aid rather than to make demands.

Finally a tall, old man came out to parley and examine a signet ring which marked the knight as a prince of Denmark. Also, he peered at the royal seals of France attached to letters from Charlemagne. At last the old man seemed satisfied.

"What would ye ask us to do?" he enquired.

"Provide food and fodder, for which fair payment shall be given. Also speak a good word concerning us to thy neighbors amongst whom I hope to enlist fighting men."

Anon the old man went back to the fort, but returned soon after to say that ten young men had agreed to join the knights, presuming a small sum would be given them as advance pay. To this demand Ogier acquiesced with seeming cheerfulness, but as a matter of fact the paying

out of money had become painful to him of late. His bag of gold no longer remained plump; it had become lean and limp. He had been altogether too liberal on the journey. However, he gave the fishermen some money and by being courteous and considerate in all ways, soon induced many of them to become his ambassadors to their neighbors. Three days later two hundred men had joined his standard.

Meanwhile his dealings with the nearby gentlefolk had not been of an encouraging nature. Although not actively hostile toward his enterprise, they were wary of it. They knew the Duke and Duchess of Denmark bore Ogier no good will and they also feared what the great nobles might do. They were in a deep quandary, too, once they learned that the newcomers had been sent by the mighty King of France. So they chose the middle course, themselves remaining at home, but at the same time allowing their retainers to enlist under Sir Ogier.

Outwardly cheery but inwardly depressed, he led his small band into the interior. He had expected to gather a far greater head. Sir Turpin's warning that he would find difficulty in uniting his people recurred to him frequently.

"I must strike some bold, resounding stroke, else men will scorn my enterprise," he mused gloomily.

Concerning this idea he earnestly consulted with Roland and Oliver, but no plan could they hit upon, save the dubious one of seeking favor and men-at-arms of Baron Geldhar, a great lord whose lands lay in their path. And Geldhar's support could only be gained by fair words, since he held a good castle and commanded five hundred knights and fighting retainers. A surly, harsh old man he was reputed to be, but respected for wisdom thereabouts.

Oliver, as has been said, possessed a great gift for making friends; so when they came to the border of the Baron's lands, Ogier and Oliver went alone to the castle where both the Baron and Baroness received them hospitably enough, although the former held them in evident suspicion. Now the Baroness chanced to be a fair, light-hearted dame and far younger than her husband. To her Oliver forthwith began to address his most courteous phrases and soon so won her regard that she came to look upon him as the comeliest and friendliest of knights and resolved to help him.

As eloquently as he could, Ogier told his tale and begged men and money of the Baron. Thereat the old man became bitterly scornful and stated in no doubtful terms that he would hazard neither men nor treasure on any mad attempt undertaken by youths of little wis-

dom in war. Patiently Ogier besought him to advance a better plan for keeping back the tide of Saxons, but the Baron derided his proposals and demanded that Ogier place himself and his men under him, the Baron, and thereby better resist the enemy.

"Perchance, ye have not heard that Castle Drayfel which stands hard by hath fallen to the Saxons?" he said, after refusing all aid. "An arm of their host reached out and suddenly took it. Whence ye may see that we have little enough time to prepare against them, and it would be madness to divide forces."

But Ogier did not heed his last words. He had slowly but excitedly risen to his feet upon hearing that Drayfel had fallen.

"Say you Drayfel is in Saxon hands? Is it held by more than a garrison?"

"By a garrison only as yet, but soon the army will come up to it."

The Dane resumed his seat and spoke with calm intensity.

"Would not the Danes be heartened should that castle be re-taken? If I do that, think ye they will the more willingly espouse my cause?"

In crabbed derision the old Baron replied, "If ye re-take Drayfel, I shall place under thy command the

sum total of my powers — if ye do. But ye cannot — and there's an end."

"Be not so certain of that. Drayfel is a hold of Duke Geoffroy, my father. There, as child and youth, I often dwelt, and I know of that castle what, methinks, is known to no other man. I can storm and take it, if ye will add to my forces twelve score good men."

Then the Baron brought down his fist upon the table. "No!" he roared. "Not a man!"

"Ye say well, my lord, to refuse thy warriors," Lady Geldhar interposed smoothly and winked covertly at Oliver, who thereupon watched her closely.

The old Baron looked at her irritably, but she continued serenely. "To give him twelve score men would only and vainly denude our castle of its garrison. Even if he should re-take Drayfel, of what avail would that be?"

"Peace, lady, peace," quoth the old man peevishly. "What know you of war and statecraft?"

"Nathless," she persisted, "this knight, who says he is Geoffroy's son, cannot with any scant twenty-five score men take a stronghold, garrisoned with perchance forty score. Spare him no men. It would be madness."

Sternly Baron Geldhar held up his hand for silence. "Say no more. Little ye realize how desperate will be our

lot at no distant time. Something must we do straightway. In sooth the taking of Drayfel were a likely deed. Thereby might the Saxon tide be stemmed." To his wife he continued to speak defiantly. "I shall aid this son of Duke Geoffroy. He shall have twelve score men."

And again Lady Geldhar winked at Oliver.

CHAPTER XI

OGIER MAKES A SUDDEN MOVE

"HE hath consented to take charge of him," said Oliver after he and Ogier had departed from Baron Geldhar.

"Take charge of him? What do you mean?" asked Ogier.

"Lady Geldhar will take care of our boy. Thus his present old nurse may return to her goodman."

In smiling admiration the Dane looked at his brown-eyed companion. "Thou, Oliver, art surely a man of foresight and a speedy worker. I had forgotten the boy. Ye have solved a knotty problem."

Continued Oliver coolly, but nevertheless keeping a sharp eye on Ogier's face. "The Baroness will see him clothed and fed — she thinks to place him amongst the servants' brats, there to learn some menial but useful trade." Then in spite of an ominous narrowing of Ogier's eyes Oliver added calmly, "She maintains it were a mis-

take and no kindness to treat the boy as if he were of noble blood since he is unknown and nameless. 'Twere better that he become accustomed to a lowly lot." Glancing at his companion he saw the taut muscles of Ogier's jaw seam the smoothness of his cheeks.

"I objected that ye would not relish making the boy an underling, and she replied that haply ye may, at the point of thy sword, enforce respect for him whiles by his side, but when ye are away — what then?"

Ogier drew in his breath sharply, opened his lips as if to vent an oath, but firmly closed them again. "I must be politic," he mused to himself.

Aloud he replied to Oliver, " 'Tis kind of Lady Geldhar. When we return to the castle, I shall thank her . . . And now let me ponder on how Drayfel is to be taken."

So they rode to their camp where the announcement of their success with Baron Geldhar aroused great enthusiasm. Roland was given the command to march the men to a certain point on the journey to Drayfel and there await the coming of the Geldhar soldiers. Thereupon Ogier retraced his way to the castle to pick up the twelve score men of the Baron. With him went the little waif for whom the Baroness had promised to care.

Anon they were led into the Baron's chamber and as they entered, cold dismay passed through Ogier's heart.

One glance and he knew the Baron had changed his mind about lending support to the storming of Drayfel. Three of his knights were with the old nobleman and also Lady Geldhar whose face displayed plain marks of distress. Save for the Baroness the man and boy faced hostile eyes.

Not a word of greeting did the Baron vouchsafe them. Instead he glared at the small waif.

"Why is that child brought hither?" he demanded morosely

"Oh, 'tis the poor waif they rescued," replied Lady Geldhar anxiously rising. "I have promised to care for him."

"At my expense," grumbled the old man. "Well, away with him to Arth, the swineherd, who well knows how to teach him to earn . . . "

The Baron's words died away amidst a general silence. A shiver of apprehension ran through every man there as Ogier, although he did not speak, drew to himself all their startled eyes.

Ever since his arrival in Denmark it had seemed to the young Dane that it was an obvious matter of duty that he bear himself gently and speak fair and softly. He must conciliate rather than command, wherefore he had perhaps borne himself too mildly. Now a fierce flame of

anger burned away all thought of temperate measures. The waif, terrified by the Baron's harsh words, crouched against his protector, raising wide, beseeching eyes. Hot rage dimmed Ogier's vision; he strained his great stature to the highest, clapped his hand to sword, and stamped his foot. His storm-filled eyes swept round until they stayed at Baron Geldhar.

"Old man," quoth Ogier trying to control the trembling of his voice, "Ye seem not to have learned that in Denmark I can command, first by right of birth, but more by right of might."

Suddenly his arm shot out at one of the Baron's knights. "Go, ye, and return with the chapel priest. Drag him from a death bed if needs be! Go!"

The knight went and none doubted that the priest would soon appear.

"Now," Ogier resumed to the Baron more calmly, "ye have presumed to give orders concerning this boy, since now he seems helpless with neither name nor parent. Within an hour he shall become thy better. A name he shall have and a parent that will see honor done to him. . . . I shall now adopt the boy as my legal son."

The waif to become a prince? For a moment there was neither word nor stir.

Then Lady Geldhar rose, saying with a sneer to the

"OLD MAN, IN DENMARK I CAN COMMAND."

men of Geldhar, "Ye *warriors* that stand stupidly! Know ye not what has come to pass? Know then that a leader has risen amongst us."

She fell at Ogier's feet and kissed his hands, and then took the waif in her arms, saying softly, "In a moment he will be a prince, and I shall hardly dare to touch him — but now I dare."

Whereat the knight, whom Ogier had despatched, pushed a plump and panting priest into their midst. And Baldwin — so they named the waif — became the son of Ogier the Dane in the sight of God and man.

Then Baron Geldhar, who since his first outbreak had remained a passive observer, approached the young knight with outstretched hand. "Sir Ogier, if twelve score of my men be not enough for the taking of Drayfel, ye shall have twenty score."

CHAPTER XII

A PLAN OF ATTACK

ON each side of Drayfel lie open meadows, so thickly overgrown with weeds and grass that on a dark night a man may creep close to the castle unseen by the warders," said Ogier to Roland and Oliver, once they had fairly started on their desperate enterprise. In a reflective tone of voice he continued on.

"As a boy, not three years agone, did I after dark more than once slip unchallenged into the waters of the moat at the point where the drawbridge falls, and enter the castle unknown to any. For beneath the moat waters runs a great beam joining the two bridge piers, and thereon may an armed man crawl under water the ten paces of its length and at the castle end emerge so close under the wall that the sentries do not see him."

"Yea," said Oliver doubtfully, "but what then?"

"Drawbridges, as ye know, are of various designs.

That of Drayfel is faulty — I know not why — both as to the length of the bridge and the height of the gate which stands just behind the bridge when the latter is upraised. The drawn-up bridge stands less high, by a man's breadth, than the top of the wall-niche into which it fits, and the gate is lower than the arch's top by the same span. A man can scale the upstanding bridge 'twixt the wall of the niche and one of the great timbers supporting the bridge floor. I have done it and made my way over the gate and down it, until I needed to drop no more than three or four paces. In like manner, shall I once more steal into the castle and make short work of cutting the bridge chains and opening the gate to our forces."

"Methinks," said Roland quickly, "that I, better than thou, might make the attempt. I am less huge than thou, whence am I better suited to agile feats of clambering."

"Perchance," smiled Ogier, "ye are a better climber, but I have had previous experience. I know where each foothold lies."

"But," objected Oliver, "ye entered during times of peace, and now there is war. Dare ye maintain ye could do all that and not, in the night's quiet, be heard by the watchmen — ye, armed with sword and buckler? Nay, they will hear ye."

"Some warlike demonstration behind the castle shall be made to distract attention from the gate."

" 'Twere worse than useless. Such threatening noise would but quicken their vigilance."

"List to me!" cried Roland.

Then he eagerly unfolded a stratagem which he had conceived, and as he proceeded even the eyes of Oliver began to glow hopefully.

"But how shall we know when thou, Ogier, hast entered the moat waters?" questioned Oliver doubtfully.

"In this manner. When I crawl toward the bridge pier, behind me shall be trailed a cord, the which, when I am ready, I shall jerk smartly as a signal to you at the other end. Thereafter shall I count five hundred to allow you time to light the torches."

"Methinks the plan will succeed," said Oliver at last. "But if you chance to drown in the moat or drop down from the gate on Saxon spear points, what then?"

"Then shall Roland take command here and clear Denmark of her foes. The nephew of Charlemagne hath the advantage over other men, that the very name of the great King works magic in his behalf."

"Belike," he continued with a smile, "it were better that I do drown, since I know Roland would never rest till the task is done."

CHAPTER XIII

THE STORMING OF DRAYFEL

ALONG a forest path, a Danish foot soldier led Broiffort, the steed which Ogier had taken from Brunamont. Under the trees the night seemed black as a cave, but the soldier trod unfalteringly. Behind him followed the five hundred men who purposed taking a strong castle garrisoned by a thousand.

"There the meadow begins," said the soldier softly.

Noiselessly the company spread out along the edge of the open space fronting Drayfel. Ogier, having muffled his armor and weapons with wisps of cloth, crept through the tall weeds and grass toward the drawbridge. Behind him Oliver unwound a cord, while Roland circled round to the rear of the castle where he and a following of men crawled a short way into the open field and busied themselves with certain tasks.

Fortunately the night remained black with heavy

clouds. A noisy wind stirred the trees and grass. Wriggling like a snake, Ogier made his way to the bridge pier and there drew taut the cord and jerked on it. Having received Oliver's answering pulls, he slowly counted five hundred and then slipped into the water beside a pier post. With his feet he felt the beam he must traverse; it lay just low enough so that he could stand on it with nose above water. He filled his lungs, sank down, and began frantically to work himself along the beam. Soon the shield on his back caught on some entanglement, but he slipped the cord, suspending it, over his head and went on. Then his foot caught and reduced him nearly to despair for his breath was well-nigh spent.

Desperately he tugged, and the foot broke loose. Dreading that he must rise for air before he had reached the goal, he suddenly felt the welcome thump of the pier post at the other side. Up he rose and drew great breaths of delicious air into his lungs.

Now when Oliver had felt Ogier's signal on the cord, a fleet runner had been despatched to where Roland and his men lay in the meadow back of the castle. Here a ring of unlighted torches had been stuck in the turf. In a trice, upon the arrival of the runner, these torches were lighted and gradually flamed into a strong glow. Then out of the grass within that circle of light rose four

WITHIN THAT CIRCLE OF LIGHT ROSE FOUR RED DEVILS.

red devils, plainly to be seen in the torch glare. To all appearance they were the same four devils that had been slain by Ogier in Castle Gundrun.

Now the Saxons of that time were a barbarous people and as such, very superstitious. Hence, when the watchers on the walls saw those four devils, they cried out in fright and their cries roused the castle. Soon the whole garrison had gathered to watch the hideous performance of evil spirits, breathing fire and smoke. Fiendishly the spirits danced and ever and anon pointed threateningly toward the castle.

Spellbound with consternation the garrison stood watching, until a warning cry rang out within the castle and a mighty clangor resounded behind them. Many sank to the stones in terror, but others, more hardy, rushed toward the gate whence the cry and uproar had come.

As soon as Ogier's head had emerged from the moat water, he heard on the castle wall above, two men talking excitedly. Another man ran to them, spoke hushed words, and rushed away. Thereat the two held their ground only a moment. Then they, too, departed hurriedly.

Taking advantage of the situation, Ogier scrambled out of the water and began the fearsome task of scaling

the upright bridge. The loss of his buckler proved fortunate, for he seemed to have lost some of his earlier climbing skill. More than once he came so near to falling as to turn his blood to ice, but he hung on desperately and at last worked his way to the top. Apparently no one had seen him. He grasped the top of the bridge and drew himself over it. Without pause he crossed the black gap between bridge and gate and began to descend inside the defenses. The old footholds were still there. From a great crossbeam on the gate he dropped the last ten feet to the stone flags. Under the arch flamed a torch whose light shone brightly upon him.

As he fell, a man, who seemed but half-awake, passed the arch where it opened into the castle. Wonderingly, this man approached Ogier, not as yet sufficiently alert to comprehend what had happened. At him the Dane sprang like a panther and slew him with a blow, but before the Saxon died, he uttered a loud screech of warning.

Instantly with his sword Ogier severed one of the windlass chains, which held up the bridge, and then the other. At that moment he loved, as never before, Caraheu's gift, Courtain, which cut the soft iron of the chain like cheese. Down crashed the bridge with a deafening roar. In a twinkling he had undone the bolts of the

gates and swung them wide — the passage to the castle stood open to the invaders.

Placing himself at the inner end of the arch, he expectantly awaited the Saxons from the front and his own men from the rear. Certain Saxons came first and regarded him doubtfully for an instant, but seeing only a solitary figure, they set upon him. The first of them the Dane quickly disposed of, but others came on. He had donned but the thinnest of hauberks and had no shield. With lightening thrusts and blows he stayed them, but the archway proved overly wide for one man to guard. By a hair's breadth he avoided a javelin and then saw a bowman nock an arrow. Giving himself up as lost, he nevertheless continued to hew and thrust. A fellow Saxon by good chance spoiled the aim of the bowman by awkwardly bumping him, but other arrows were being nocked. Not all of them would miss.

Of a sudden two Saxons on Ogier's flanks fell dead; two knights burst past him from the rear. Roland and Oliver had come, and the thirty French knights and the hardy Danes. The Saxons turned and fled back into the castle, where at first they made only a half-hearted resistance to the attackers. A great slaughter ensued, but Ogier and his chiefs knew that the Saxons would sometime stand and fight desperately, for they were no cow-

ards. So the invaders kept in a compact body. Some of his men, however, Ogier despatched to surround the moat in order to prevent any of the enemy from escaping over the walls.

Now man for man the Saxons were vastly inferior to the knights of Charlemagne, and the Danes, too, were better men than the barbarians. However, the Saxons finally formed for a last desperate resistance on the battlements. But the knights, with their superior arms and training, cut them down in such numbers that the remainder threw down their weapons and surrendered.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BATTLE AT ELSINORE

THAT same night Ogier held a council of war, with both the French and the Danes in attendance.

Quoth one of the Danish chiefs, "Not one of the Saxon wolves escaped death or capture, albeit many made attempt to swim the moat."

"Are ye sure of that?" Ogier demanded.

"Yea, it is certain."

"Then these are my commands," said Sir Ogier, glowing with satisfaction. "Sir Roland and Sir Oliver shall lead our prisoners to Baron Geldhar as proof that we are no idle boasters. Bid the Baron remember his promise of more men. Then bid him hasten with ye two to the greatest one of the near-by nobles. Him you must persuade to join us. That done the three of ye, scattering, shall command other nobles to come to our aid."

Continued he with a meaningful smile to Roland and

Oliver. "Times have changed. Heretofore have we asked favors. But from this time forth shall we issue commands. Tell the nobles to do as bid, else shall they feel the weight of my hand. But when ye, Sir Roland, have done what ye may in that wise, return hastily hither with Baron Geldhar. But Oliver has a further task and a difficult one.

"You, Sir Oliver, when ye have roused what nobles ye can, then ye are to proceed to the seaports and muster every ship of war. The Danes be good seamen, wherefore shouldst thou be able to gather a fleet of such size as shall dare attack the Saxon ships. Then sail around to the east coast where the main fleet of the enemy is anchored."

Turning to a Danish chief, he continued, "Choose a hundred good men and scatter them amidst the villages to enlist men-at-arms. And now to bed — let us all catch what rest we can before dawn. To-morrow we must act swiftly."

In the morning Sir Ogier rose somewhat fretful with anxiety. He had indeed struck a resounding blow, but would the people now gather to him? Before noon, however, he felt easier. Men-at-arms had already begun to pour in. Before night three hundred men of Baron Geldhar's forces arrived. All spoke glowingly of how the countryside had risen to new hope and effort.

Within four days Ogier commanded twenty-five hundred men who had already thrown up earthworks round the meadows where they were camped. Nor had the Saxons yet learned of what had taken place at Drayfel, for the Danes kept such constant watch that every Saxon who approached was taken or slain.

Then came Baron Geldhar who seemed to have grown far more young and strong in the last few days. The gathering host, the smells of the camp, the clamor of commands and shouting, together with the hope of making head against the Saxons, had combined to bring back his youth. Soon after him came Roland.

"Three days hence," quoth Baron Geldhar jovially, "fifteen thousand men shall be ready for the fight. Thy coming has been like a billet of wood to a drowning man. Thou'rt hailed as savior; and no man, be he commoner or lord, dares do otherwise than hurry to thy assistance."

Ogier rose from the stool on which he sat, went to one of the arrow slits in the wall, which served as windows to the castle chamber, looked out, and returned restlessly to his seat.

Turning to Roland he said, "Am I a sluggard that I have here spent four deedless days despite there are Saxons lying near by who remain unscattered? Thine uncle, the great King, had he been here, would ere this

have sped toward them, as if impelled by magic, and crushed them, maugre any odds."

"Nay," said the old Baron soothingly. "Albeit Charlemagne is wont to fall upon foes ere they are aware of his intentions, nathless, like a wise serpent, he coils before he strikes, else would he strike less surely. And thou, too, must coil. Bide here patiently these three coming days."

"Sobeit," agreed Ogier. Then again addressing Roland he continued, "Three days hence with fifteen thousand followers shall we march upon and utterly rout, these neighboring Saxons. And then shalt thou take one half our forces and I the other half and ye shall go one way and I another, but we shall meet at Elsinore and there combine once more, for at Elsinore, besieging the town, lies the main fleet and army of the invaders."

At these words Roland sprang up joyously and toppled Ogier off his stool. At the moment no happier man lived than the nephew of Charlemagne.

"I shall beat ye to Elsinore!" he cried. "My purse on it!"

"An ye do," said Ogier, picking himself up laughing, "I shall name thee wizard, for I shall send thee north, which is a longer way and with more waters to pass than the southern route which I myself shall take."

"Here is my purse; match it an ye dare," cried Roland.

Four days later, having left only a castle garrison at Drayfel, Ogier's army sped to attack the Saxons near at hand, whom as planned they utterly routed before the Saxons were able to prepare themselves for battle. Then, following a few brief hours of rest and preparation, Roland took the northern path and Ogier the southern, both marching at a speed which kept the foe fleeing in dismay. Nor did they pause more than momentarily where the enemy defied them from walled castles or towns. At such strongholds they did no more than tell off forces to beleaguer them, while the main armies swept on. And while the forces left behind somewhat decreased the numbers of the marching armies, nevertheless in the end they had more than at the beginning, inasmuch as recruits constantly joined them on the way.

Now Sir Ogier found few obstacles to delay him until he came to the eastern shore where he looked out upon the strait which lay between him and the island on which Elsinore lies. Here he sent out men to scour the shore for boats, but so few boats were found that he spent three whole days in making the passage. When at last all were over, he again drove his men at a breath-taking pace. That he had outstripped Roland seemed so certain that he began to store his memory with mockeries wherewith to twit his comrade when they should next meet.

Three days he hurried on and then paused some hours for rest and to await the reports of his scouts concerning the disposition of the enemy. Elsinore lay only a few miles before them. The scouts returned with word that the Saxons displayed no evidence of fear of an attack. So with great caution they marched to the edge of a plain bordering the shore. About a mile away at the right lay Elsinore, and at the left, the Saxon army. Before both city and camp rode the ships of the enemy in the channel. Keeping his men hidden, Ogier surveyed the scene and pondered.

"They outnumber me vastly," he mused, "nathless I shall not tarry till Roland comes."

He opened his lips to give the command for immediate battle when a wonderful spectacle held him silent and spellbound. From the hills on his left an army suddenly poured down upon the bewildered Saxons. Marvelling, Ogier saw the attackers to be parlous few compared to the Saxon horde, but their horsemen smote so gallantly and the footmen came on with such high hearts that the enemy nowhere made any stout stand. And now he recognized the banner of Roland and the armor of the French knights.

Again Sir Ogier opened his lips to command an advance, but again he fell silent, his eyes refusing to look

away from the battle. Hither and thither the French and Danish knights hurtled, sweeping the Saxons before them, while the arrows and spears of the Danish footmen spread confusion. Great deeds Roland performed with his own hands, but he never forgot that he commanded; so skillfully did he order his ranks that they burst through all resistance.

Then Ogier ordered his troops to occupy such positions as would enable them to move to Roland's assistance, did he need any. And soon he knew that Roland would need no help, for the valor of that small army astounded all beholders. So Ogier resolved that the glory of the day should be theirs alone. At length all the Saxons had been slain or captured or had fled to their ships, and then Ogier rode across the plain, grasped Sir Roland's hand, and laid in it a purse of gold.

"The wager is paid," he said, smiling.

"But — wherefore — why, an ye were here, why came ye not to share the glory?" exclaimed Roland.

To this Ogier made no reply but only smiled, and then Roland knew that he had purposely held his hand that the glory of the day might not be divided.

"But I cannot understand how thou didst arrive so soon," cried Ogier. "Did some enchanter transport thee over those waters which delayed me full three days?"

"Nay, no enchantment," laughed Roland. "I did but take advantage of what came to hand. The countrymen brought in some few small craft, and then by happy chance three Saxon longboats were taken by my soldiers. And while the boats were collecting, I set men a-building rafts. The second day every man and horse of my forces, all at one time, embarked on boat or raft; the boats pulling at the rafts. Then we clove the waters at a better pace than ye might deem possible, for the raftsmen wielded paddles. Wind and tide favored; within a scant ten hours after taking ship, we had landed each man and beast."

Replied Ogier admiringly, "The passage of those waters is a deed equal or greater than thy victory o'er the Saxons. And now let us take stock of our gains. Ha — see how the rascals are making away in their ships!" He pointed to the hastily departing longboats of the Saxons.

Toward evening of that same day there rose a sudden shouting of the captains, followed by the hubbub of men standing to arms. A great fleet was drawing in toward the city. Bands of Danish bowmen hastily ranged themselves along the shore where they dug shallow ditches. The knights sat ready to overwhelm any who might dare to land. Steadily the fleet drew near, and

then of a sudden the banner of Oliver fluttered from the foremost ship. A mighty and joyful cheer went up from the shore and it was answered by those on the ships.

As Oliver sprang ashore, Roland and Ogier dashed to him and saw with astonishment that his face seemed sad rather than triumphant.

"Six fled clean away," said Oliver sorrowfully.

"Six Saxons, mean ye?"

"Nay, six Saxon ships, burdened with Saxons."

"Ay, but nigh sixty Saxon ships departed this harbor. What of the fifty and more?"

"Sunk or taken!" cried Oliver casting aside his pretence of gloom. Truth was, he had never felt more triumphant.

Then did the three youths hand in hand dance about in a circle like delighted children rather than commanders of armies and fleets. The warriors, looking on, smiled affectionately. These might be rollicking boys, but they had saved Denmark.

CHAPTER XV

THE DEATH OF DUKE GEOFFROY

ON the clear autumn morn, following the overthrow of the Saxons, the knights and captains of the conquerors blithely donned their arms and set out on the short way to Elsinore, the capital city of Denmark.

At the head of the column rode Sir Ogier between Sir Oliver and Sir Roland, all with heads bared to the sun. Behind followed the array of warriors, all agleam with polished steel and gay trappings of many colors. Their horses pranced as if they, too, had caught the holiday spirit. With songs and cheers, with flowers and ferns, the people, crowding along the way, welcomed them, but when the three leaders passed, an awed hush fell on the glad throng.

"That is he — there!" they whispered. "Is he not like unto a god from Asgaard?"

In their best finery maidens pelted them with flowers,

while their eyes grew dreamy in the hope that some one of the bold knights would come as a lover. Old men and women wept, and children came fearlessly amidst them, offering posies and sprigs of green.

But as they drew near the gates of Elsinore, Ogier observed certain men and boys passing through the crowds spreading tidings which seemed to strike the hearers dumb. And when the city wall had been reached, Roland cried, "See, they are draping the gate with black." Outside the gate stood an old officer and twelve men at attention, all clad in mourning garb.

"Sir," spake the old officer to Ogier, "we bring doleful tidings. Thy father hath this very hour passed away in death."

For a moment Ogier groped vainly for a reply. At length he said, "Strange that he should die on this precise day. Of what malady died he?"

"That can none answer. A lingering sickness it was and baffling to the surgeons."

"Beware, young friend," quoth Sir Geldhar earnestly. "Take heed lest you, too, die of that same sickness. Give me now thy promise that thou wilt take neither food nor drink in thy father's abode until that I give thee leave."

"Ay," replied Ogier miserably, "I promise." Solemnly they rode to the grim, gray, vine-clad castle where

Ogier had been born. With bent heads his chiefs followed him into the dim, hushed chapel where a coffin stood amidst lighted candles. Before it there knelt, weeping, a lady in black flowing robes. For a time she paid no heed to the newcomers, but anon she arose and glanced questioningly about until her tearful eyes fell on Ogier who knew her for his stepmother.

"Ogier — son," she said in faltering tones, "there lies thy father, the erstwhile support of Denmark, of his child and of me. Dead he lies, but thou, his mighty son, hast come in his stead." Toward the Dane she swayed with outstretched arms.

Now in truth this scene was hardly one to excite mirth, but had some disinterested beholder been there, he might have smiled at the apprehensive nervousness of the Danish lords. They shuffled uneasily; Baron Geldhar shook his head savagely; one lord even went so far as to make motions as if to cast the lady from their presence. Not one there but felt for the wife of Duke Geoffroy the most intense ill will. They were fearful lest Ogier fall under her spell. Each firmly believed that the lady had poisoned her husband that her own son might be declared duke; in fact they held her responsible for the greater part of Denmark's ills.

They were somewhat reassured, however, to see Sir

Ogier avoid his stepmother's embrace by taking her hand and leading her silently from the chapel.

"Come thou, too," he said to Baron Geldhar, and the lady trembled for she knew the Baron to be an enemy.

"Of what malady died my father?" asked Ogier when they had entered a secluded chamber.

"I — I know not. The surgeons know not. How . . . "

"We believe he died of poison," interrupted Geldhar gruffly.

"Nay!" she screamed. Ogier raised his hand for silence.

"In the small castle at Pellnore," he said, "shalt thou live hereafter in honor, nothing disturbed and nothing disturbing. Thy son, Guyon, may at whiles visit thee there, but I now warn thee 'gainst inciting him to discontent.

"Baron Geldhar, thou shalt see her thence and, too, I bid thee rid this castle of all the retainers in it and install such as are surely trustworthy." More mildly he again turned to his stepmother. "Ease thy mind concerning Guyon. The Duke's son he is and my brother; as such shall he be respected where I command."

CHAPTER XVI

A LEGEND

NOW hardly had the ceremonies attendant upon the burial of Duke Geoffroy been consummated than Sir Roland again led his army against such Saxons as still remained in the land. At the same time he brought to account those nobles who remained sullen and defiant of Ogier's commands. Swift as the west wind Roland drove his men over hill and dale, through swamp and forest, and attacked at noon, night or morning. Numberless paths he trod until not a Saxon disturbed the peace and every nobleman swore fealty to Sir Ogier.

Oliver had been no less active, for his fleets swept the coast and brought terror to Norse and Saxon pirates. When the waters had been cleared of those enemies, he scattered his warships amongst the rivers and harbors where they waited to swoop upon any bold rover who should dare approach.

Within two months power over all Denmark lay in Ogier's palm; no man dared say him nay. And then he bade Roland and Oliver return from their warlike missions, and when they did so, the Danes so overwhelmed them with the courtesies of gratitude that the young knights grew weary of adulation. Great were the feastings and dances of knights and ladies; minstrels filled the halls with voice and harmony. Tournaments, too, were held, and in these Ogier, Oliver and Roland were never overcome, for they would not oppose each other and no others could unhorse them. In truth, the world never learned which one of the three heroes might have prevailed against the other two.

But of these peace-time festivities Roland and Oliver at last grew weary and determined to seek adventures elsewhere. So Ogier bade a reluctant farewell to them and to the thirty knights who went at the same time. He himself remained to attack the tedious and endless tasks which must be faced by all just rulers. He felt lonely then in spite of the good company of his Danish lords and the love of the people.

As a pattern for his own conduct Ogier took the example of Charlemagne, than whom no more tireless toiler ever strove for the good of his people. Powerful

of mind and perfect of body, the great King could labor endless hours each day and never be broken. Should he wake at night, he found books ready at his bedside that he might waste no time in idle wakefulness. While dressing and eating he conducted matters of state, and so all through the day he busied himself, pausing only to exercise in arms or to heed the words of the learned men whom he kept in constant attendance.

Of learned men, few were then to be found in Denmark, but such as there were the young ruler encouraged to found schools. A gentler spirit began to prevail among the people and they became more deft in craftsmanship.

Thus the young Dane sought to emulate the great King and succeeded very well, although his youthful inexperience often led him into errors. He even drew up codes of laws, which in itself is a great task.

In truth, one of the legends which is still related concerning Sir Ogier — whom the Danes call Holger Danske — testifies to the confidence of his people in him. Holger Danske, so runs the story, still lives. He sits sleeping — his beard grown through the wood of a table before him — in an ancient buried cellar at Elsinore. There he sits and there shall he continue to sit until some disaster befalls Denmark — some disaster so fell that none but he may hope to cope with it. Then

HE SITS SLEEPING IN AN ANCIENT BURIED CELLAR.

shall he arise and again deliver his land from peril. Mayhap this legend grew, less because of his might in war and combat than because in times of peace he toiled unweariedly to mete out even-handed justice.

Now all this time Baldwin, Ogier's adopted son, grew more comely and keener of wit. All loved the boy and especially his father. Often the knight, wearied with hard thinking throughout the day and distraught with the worriment of making quick decisions affecting the weal or woe of many, found rest beside a blazing fire, his arm round Baldwin, while the lad would tell in quaint language of his doings during the day or of his fanciful imaginings. Then would they talk of Oliver, Roland, and the deeds of heroes. But of all Ogier's tales those most loved by the lad concerned Prince Caraheu of India. Rapturously the boy gave ear to all stories of the noble Saracen's valor, his generosity, his oriental splendor. Gloriande, the brave and lovely Princess, also captivated him. Sometimes Baldwin would fetch Courtain, the sword, feel its razor edge, and glory in the flashing jewels encrusting the hilt. Once he asked what the strange, oriental writings on the blade signified, but this Ogier could not tell him. He himself had once asked Caraheu the same question and the Prince had smilingly replied,

"Seek not to know, albeit they be words of wisdom, for wisdom oft brings more of sad thought than good cheer."

The armor, helmet and shield, too, Baldwin would handle with reverence, and concerning the marks of thrust and slash he would eagerly demand to know who had been wearing the arms when those blows had been endured. Anon he could point to each dent in the helmet and name it "Caraheu's dent" or "Ogier's dent."

On such evenings the Dane's thoughts always strayed to the sweet British Princess, whom he had met on his way to Denmark. More than once he had pondered on the thought that Baldwin might be the lost Prince Rafe, but he could not bring himself to believe it. Prince Rafe had been described as fair-haired, while Baldwin's hair was brown. And although Baldwin's hardships as a child might have delayed his growth, it seemed impossible that he could be old enough to be the prince.

As time passed, Sir Ogier's thoughts dwelt more and more on Princess Clarisse. Fair, alluring visions of the girl haunted his dreams; he pictured her there in Denmark with him and Baldwin. How wonderful would it be to go to Britain and bring her back as wife! At last, because he could not leave Denmark, he sent to her a messenger, bearing a letter. And when his messenger returned Ogier first grew wrathful and then gloomy.

At the British court, so said the messenger, one Baron Lugor stood high in King Achar's favor and commanded all approaches to King and Princess. By Sir Lugor had the messenger been prevented from addressing either Princess Clarisse or her father. To Baron Lugor he had been forced to give his letter or let it remain undelivered. Thereafter a reply had been handed him, along with a command that he hasten out of the kingdom.

"I misdoubt me," said the messenger to Sir Ogier, "if your letter came to the Princess. I heard a rumor that Sir Lugor stands a suitor for her hand."

The letter, which the messenger had brought back from Britain, had on it the stamp of the royal seal, whence Ogier believed it must have been written with King Achar's sanction. Briefly it stated that no word of Prince Rafe had been received, that Princess Clarisse was to be married soon, and that the torn condition of Britain rendered difficult the reception of visitors; wherefore Achar did not feel easy about inviting guests. Throughout was its tone cold and repellant. Ogier, deeply offended, resolved to forget Clarisse, but in attempting to do so, of course he only stimulated his longing for her.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ROBBER FASTNESS

TWO long years Ogier toiled at governing Denmark, during which time he paid particular attention to the mental and physical development of his half-brother, Guyon. And the promise displayed by the growing youth so greatly pleased the elder brother that he determined upon making Guyon Duke of Denmark.

Now Ogier himself was the heir to the ducal crown, but he had spoken no more than the truth when he had told Sir Turpin that he aspired to wider domains than Denmark. So he made Guyon duke, although, as adviser to the youth, he continued to rule the land. The Danes from time to time would smile to see that the very thing which the stepmother had plotted to bring about had been carried out by the very man against whom she plotted.

When two years were done however, a great restlessness seized upon Sir Ogier. He longed to go forth alone, to meet with stirring adventures and for a time to forget the burdens of government. So one day he bade farewell to Elsinore and rode without attendants to a seaport and embarked on a ship which took him to a landing in the Netherlands. Arrived there, he led Broiffort over the ship's plank and rode into a forest.

Contentedly he passed through the fresh autumn sunshine, while a cool breeze rustled the reddening leaves. A stag bounded into the road before him and stayed to stare in playful surprise. Once the graceful animal lept sideways in pretended fear and then took a few steps forward as if inviting the knight to follow. Ogier spurred his horse; whereupon the stag gave a great leap and disappeared.

On rode the knight. He had been laboring hard at Elsinore; he found quietude soothing to his spirits.

The sun grew warmer and lulled him into dreamy imaginings. How heavenly, mused he, would be the presence of Princess Clarisse, riding there with him through the autumn-tinted woodlands! He pictured her on a white palfrey, smiling happily and sometimes extending her white hand for him to kiss.

Of a sudden he discovered that he was holding his

arms outstretched before him as if to clasp some longed-for object. He lowered them and rubbed his eyes.

"I must have fallen asleep," he said aloud, "and, methinks, dreamed a fair dream. Now of what did I dream? Ah, I know. It was of Clarisse. Before I drowsed my thoughts were of her. I wonder if her brother, Rafe, has been found."

So he rode on in lazy contentment until a countryman, seemingly somewhat frightened, came down the road toward him. Upon sighting the knight, the yokel stopped in sudden trepidation, but upon looking more closely, he hastened to Ogier's side.

"Sir knight, do ye not know that this way is dangerous? I warn thee to depart hastily."

"For thy warning, friend, I thank thee, but what is the danger ye speak of?"

"A bold robber infests these marches — one styling himself Sir Crassnor. In strong bands his men scour the countryside and take pity on none. Such prisoners as they take must find ransom or die."

"Friend, thy tale seemeth so fanciful that I can scarce credit it. These marches fall within the domains of King Charlemagne who is wont to put down trespassers with a strong hand."

Insisted the peasant, "This Sir Crassnor is no com-

mon miscreant. No castle doth he inhabit. He pitches camp in some forest opening, he and five score followers. There they hastily dig a ditch in the shape of a circle and line it with sharp stakes. And barely are they arrived at some new spot than they are abroad, plundering and killing. Ere the lord of the marches has become well aware of their presence and has made ready to storm their lair, the robbers are secretly away with booty and captives."

"Canst thou guide me to that robber camp?"

"Nay, I dare not. Begone, I tell thee. Ride to the duke of these marches and swiftly return with soldiers — the which may be done by to-morrow's sunset."

"Canst thou not at least describe how I may find the camp?"

"Nay," replied the peasant, "go you to the duke."

"The camp," repeated the knight imperiously, whereupon the yokel grumblingly complied.

So Ogier followed the indicated path and anon saw through the trees the defences of the villains. A rough bridge, which a dozen men could raise and lower, formed the only path over their ditch. The place swarmed with men, and in one spot spearmen guarded a half score of prisoners, both men and women.

For a time Ogier watched from concealment and then

galloped into the open. Fifty paces from the bridge, he halted and cried out, "Come forth, Sir Crassnor, and do battle!"

On the mound inside the ditch warriors gathered. The prisoners sprang up and gazed hopefully at the lone knight.

To his challenge came no reply, but the robber leader, observing that Ogier led no followers, quietly ordered his riders to make ready for a sortie. Ordinarily his design would have been at once detected by a watchful man, but Ogier saw nothing of it; he was staring blankly at a fair-haired boy prisoner, whom the guards seemed to hold in some little deference. In an instant Ogier knew, or deemed he knew, that here was Prince Rafe, the long lost brother of his ladylove.

Suddenly a score of horsemen sprang to saddle and dashed out over the bridge, and they had almost come upon Sir Ogier, before he wheeled, just in time, and fled before them.

Just now he needed leisure to think. He must devise a plan for the boy's rescue. So he kept well ahead of his pursuers until the two most fleetly mounted distanced their fellows. Like a flash Ogier turned and smote the first and then the other, both headlong. Again he fled, but soon the robbers observing that Broiffort was too swift

for them abandoned the chase, while Ogier continued on back to the highway.

He rode in deep perplexity. The peasant had held out no hope of assistance until the morrow's eve, which would doubtless prove too late, now that the robbers knew their lair had been discovered. He feared they would be gone by the next morning. Finally, because no better plan occurred to him, he decided to ride until dark toward the stronghold of the duke of the marches, in the hope of chancing upon fighting men whom he might lead against the robbers. Should he meet with no success in this, he determined to return and, fortune favoring, rescue the boy single-handed.

The road he now followed skirted the sea, sometimes looking down upon the shore and anon winding inland some distance. At last he came to an unbridged brook running athwart his path. About to ford the stream, he chanced to hear on his left the stamping of horses' hoofs. Abruptly he reined his horse and caught a faint murmur of voices. Then he dismounted and quietly led Broiffort to a place of concealment and himself stole toward the voices. Soon he came near the brook where it flowed through the trees and, peering cautiously forward, saw what filled him with wonder.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE VIKING SHIP

NOW as Ogier stared through the brush, he saw on the opposite bank of the rivulet two knights lying at their ease, elbows to earth and with eyes intently fixed on the ground beside them. At times they would reach out a hand as if to caress whatever it was they were intent upon. So absorbed were they that Ogier dared creep to where he could hear their words.

"See how daintily the flowerlet rests on her graceful stem," said one. "She seems to nod a friendly greeting."

" 'Tis a fair thing," agreed the other, "but see how bravely this little beetle makes his way. E'en when I rest on him the weight of my finger, still he struggles on intrepidly."

"I love," quoth the first, "the pure blue of the waxen petals, so soft and fragile."

"True, nathless in purity of hue, the gold and black

of this little crawler will match any flower. See how he gleams!"

"Ay, but I have a dread of crawling things," replied the first. "Flowers, vines, and the growing things of the earth be harmless and sweet, while crawlers . . . "

"Nay," interrupted the other, "growing things of the earth sometimes be poisonous and hateful. I likewise love flowers, but moving creatures are, methinks, more fascinating. Oft are they beautiful and their habits of interest."

"Little can I brook the pests which creep and fly and sting and live in filth." The flower knight shuddered and thereafter listened rather impatiently.

"Condemn not all small creatures as bad because some are so. Thorny and evil-smelling be certain kinds of flowers. I love to watch the little fellows go about their small affairs and I feel kindly toward such of them as are fair, as is this gold and sable beetle."

Suddenly the flower-loving knight exclaimed in disgust; he reached out his finger and pressed down forcefully with it. Thereat the beetle knight cried out in anger.

"Thou hast wilfully crushed my beetle! Ye knew I held him dear and yet ye crushed him!"

"Yea," replied the other. "The foul thing did evilly

come on and tear a petal from my flower. Why should I not kill the filthy thing?"

" 'Twas ungently done. The insect naught harmed thee. Wherefore did ye not stop him ere he came near thy paltry weed?"

"Why did I not? Why did ye not? Ye who pretend to knowledge of crawling things? How could I know the savage thing intended harm to my flower?"

Not a word of all this escaped the ears of Ogier. His face grew red as he arranged his long, thin tunic so that it might cover his armor and sword. He drew a scarf from his belt and with it disguised his helmet, whose visor he drew down. And all the while he listened.

Now the last words of the knight of the flower caused the beetle knight to catch his breath. With an effort he kept his hand from his sword. Again the flower knight spoke heatedly.

"See the poor, mangled petal! A thousand miry bugs would I slay to repay the deed!"

Then the beetle knight seized the blue flower, crushed it, and cast it down beside the dead beetle.

"An thou'rt so blithe to kill my beetle, now is he avenged."

Up started the other, hand to sword hilt, but his companion rose, too, and faced him defiantly. And then they

had certainly drawn and laid on, had not Sir Ogier at that moment burst from his ambush, splashed through the brook and rushed between them.

"Sir knights," he calmly addressed them, "I see ye think to fight, but now that I am here such may not be."

He stopped and saw with glee that both the knights had now turned their anger upon him. Neither had time to speak, ere he continued loftily. "Howbeit, if ye must fight, then shall ye fight me. In sooth being lesser men than I am and not so tall, I shall not engage ye in turn but both together."

Then spake the knight of the beetle, his voice halting with the rage he tried to hold in check. His words, however, were courteous enough.

"Go thy way, sir knight, ere harm befall thee. What concerns us two here concerns not thee."

"Ay, but it shall, despite you," returned Ogier. "Ye both shall battle with me or not at all."

The knight of the flower now addressed his companion. "Sir, prithee stand aside a moment, the while I teach this huge bungler a much-needed lesson. No long time shall I be about the task, sithen large words, not deeds, are to be looked for in unwieldy braggarts, such as he."

"Not so," spake Ogier, "Both or none shall withstand

me. In sooth I so little esteem your prowess that I count it no more than knightly that I myself shall fight with head bared. I need no helmet."

So saying he hastily removed the helmet, for the flower knight had become so enraged that further delay seemed impossible. When the last fastening had been loosened, he suddenly snatched off the helm.

"Ogier!" shouted he of the flower, letting sword and shield fall weakly.

"Ogier!" cried the beetle knight.

Both of them rushed to him with welcoming arms, raising visors as they came.

Crying out in well feigned astonishment Ogier avoided them.

"Oliver! Caraheu! Nay, it cannot be. I am dreaming. Ye be spirits risen to mock me, else I would find ye friends, not enemies. Caraheu and Oliver are known to love one another."

In shame Oliver hung his head and Caraheu looked at the ground but found no words there. Ogier pinched their arms as if still in doubt of their reality. "A marvel," he said, "it is to have chanced upon ye, but more than marvellous that ye are at bitter odds."

"Marvellous well it is ye came," quoth Oliver sheepishly. "Else in my madness I had done a foul deed in

opposing this noble prince. Naught have I to say in excuse, but at least I may beg forgiveness and perchance receive it."

"Revile not thyself for what was less thy fault than mine." With outstretched hand Caraheu came to Oliver. "Like a drunken brawler I took offense. Some evil enchantment possessed me."

"Wherefore did ye quarrel?" demanded Sir Ogier.

"A matter better forgotten," replied Oliver. Then he went on hastily, "But what fair wind has brought thee to this lonely spot?"

"That were no marvel, but it is a great wonder that you and Prince Caraheu thought to fight. I prithee tell me the cause."

"Barely can I remember why we quarrelled; some silly matter," said Caraheu. Then he, too, tried to change the subject.

"But glad I am of thy coming, Ogier the Dane. What of thy adventures since we parted at Rome?"

Gravely the Dane shook his head. "Ye shall not escape. As a peacemaker I came and must know why ye quarrelled."

"An you must learn a thing so paltry, it was no more than that his beetle bit my flower," said Oliver grinning.

Enquiringly Ogier looked from one to the other. "Flower? Beetle? Some rare flower perchance; not one of these common blue things of which I can see a thousand?"

"It was one of them."

Then the Dane roared loudly, caught the two in his arms, and could scarcely stand for laughter. "I saw and heard all," he said weakly. At last he drew himself up and addressed them as a schoolmaster scolds refractory boys. "Of no evil spells were ye possessed. You quarrelled because of fear." The others opened their eyes in doubt, but he went on severely. "Had Caraheu been some lesser knight, thou, Oliver, the kind, courtly, brown-eyed knight, had smiled at beetles, flowers, and their trivial affairs. But Prince Caraheu crushed thy flower — Caraheu, never beaten of earthly knight. Ye feared to be thought afeared. And hadst thou been other than the famed Sir Oliver who might match e'en Sir Roland or the valiant Sir Renaud, then Caraheu, the gracious and gentle prince and warrior who loaths vulgar brawling, had but laughed and found him another beetle. He feared what men might say if he avoided battle with Sir Oliver."

"How fares Baldwin, thy little son?" asked Oliver, grinning still more broadly.

"Son?" cried Caraheu. "I knew not that thou hadst a wife?"

So Caraheu was told of Baldwin and in conclusion Ogier said laughing, "His father-confessor, the good priest, complains that the lad's knowledge of saints reaches not overly far, but that he can talk endlessly of Caraheu and Oliver and Roland."

"I like the boy so well, despite I have not seen him," quoth Caraheu, "that I shall anon present him with a jade amulet. A small thing it is, but ancient and curious. It hangs by a silver chain, and on it is delicately carven the figure of a chess player who, 'tis said, causes him who wears the amulet to become invincible at the game of chess."

"He will be enchanted," returned Ogier. "Merely to touch aught that hath belonged to the great Prince of India gives him joy, but a charmed amulet to better his skill in chess were a peerless treasure. He hath a fancy for the game."

Here the pad, pad of flying feet through the leaves halted further talk. A young shepherd, girt with short sword, burst into view from the direction of the sea. He stopped uncertainly and then hastened toward the three knights.

"I prithee, sir knights, come with me to the Abbey of

St. Mary! A dragon ship of Norse vikings hath come to the shore. They design to sack the abbey. Come! With you to aid, the walls may be defended!"

In the joy and surprise of meeting his comrades, Sir Ogier had forgotten that Prince Rafe must be rescued from the robbers, but now he remembered the boy and his plight. Vikings he knew were terrible fighters . . . if he could enlist their aid against Sir Crassnor's band . . .

"Hold a moment, shepherd. How many be these Norsemen?"

"Four score, methinks, I crept close and heard them. They will come in no great time."

"Where lie they?"

"North — a mile — on the shore."

"Then shall we three post to them, while thou goest on to warn the monks." Then to the two knights he said, "To horse!" and in a moment they were spurring through the trees toward the seashore.

On the way the Dane explained his plan to the other two.

"The Norsemen must be won to join us 'gainst Sir Crassnor's robbers, but it will be of no avail to bespeak them courteously, sith they have scant respect for anything save strength and daring. These qualities, howbeit, they esteem most highly. My purpose is to burst upon

them suddenly, challenge their leader to single fight, and thus gain ascendancy over them."

"And I shall invite a second one of them to do battle," said Sir Caraheu.

"And I, a third," quoth Oliver.

Soon from the height of a bluff they looked down on the sea and the pirate ship. On the stony beach the vikings were making ready to march. With a shout the three knights urged their horses down the steep slope, which the gallant steeds took with stiff forelegs and hind feet to bellies. In a twinkling the startled sea rovers had formed their line of defense, each shield lapping that next to it until a solid wall faced the foe. To this living fortress rode the three knights and there halted.

"There lies my gage," cried Ogier, flinging down on the stones a jingling purse. "No glove is it but a bag of gold, and I throw it to thy chief. An he betters me in single fight, the gold is his and my horse and arms which be more of worth than all thy ship contains."

Crash fell another bag of coins. "An any other champion among ye all would gain that gold and my horse and arms, let him come forth," cried Oliver.

And Caraheu echoed his words, once he had cast down a pouch of money. "From the far south and east I come," spake Caraheu, "and until now have met no

Norsemen, but many a tale is told of ye fair-bearded rovers who fear no foe. There lies my gage."

Silent with astonishment stood the vikings for some moments, but anon they began to cast greedy eyes at the gold and the steeds and fair arms of the knights, better by far than any Norse arms.

Then the chief of the Norsemen stepped out of the line, a warrior as huge as Ogier himself, and Ogier stood taller than any other of Charlemagne's knights.

"Sir knight," spake the great viking, "think not that I wait in fear of aught save treachery. The manner in which ye came and what ye have said confused me."

He took up a bag of gold and threw it down. "You are bold and confident, sir knights, to stake such treasures on the issue of battle with the pick of us. An we best you the treasure is ours, but if we do not, what is thy demand?"

"Naught save that ye and all thy men follow me to an enterprise which shall repay you tenfold what thou couldst gain at the poor abbey of St. Mary. Some toil and danger shall be met with, but success is nigh assured. All spoil shall be thine, but all captives, mine alone."

"What stronghold is to be stormed?"

"A forest camp, ditched and staked and defended by

THEY LOOKED DOWN ON THE SEA AND THE PIRATE SHIP.

five score men. Rich spoil is there, but if it be less than I believe, then shall I from mine own store give thee wealth."

"Sir Chief," cried a strong viking, striding forth, "I covet the arms and gold of that knight." He pointed to Caraheu. "Give me leave to take them from him."

And another rover demanded to fight Oliver.

"Granted," quoth the chief. "Howbeit, before we fight, I would first be told the way to that spoil-filled camp. Perchance in no long time these knights shall be unable to speak."

Grinning in sympathy with the roar of laughter which went up from the Norsemen, Sir Ogier told the chief how the camp might be found, and then the knights dismounted and advanced upon their opponents sword in hand.

With battle-axe upraised the viking chief sprang at Ogier. Often before he had crushed a foe with a single blow and so he now purposed, but of the arts of combat the rude northmen had not the wide knowledge which the more civilized peoples of the south had gathered. The viking had had little or no experience in fighting a knight of Charlemagne, while Ogier had been carefully taught how to successfully oppose a northman.

The terrible axe rang against the Damascene shield,

glanced from the hard metal and buried its edge in the earth, so mightily had the chief struck and so certain had he been that the blow would go home. Before he could recover his position — for the viking had almost fallen on his face — Courtain had fallen on his shield and cut it almost in two. Ogier might then have straightway killed his antagonist, but he had no desire so to do.

Somewhat shaken but undaunted, the Norseman came on again with a swing of the axe, which Ogier avoided by a quick sidestep, followed by a skilful back-hand stroke which shore the axe head from its handle. In an instant the whole upper part of the chief's winged helmet had been cut away, leaving his pate bare, and before he could snatch another weapon, the flat of Courtain had come down on his uncovered crown. He sank dazedly to hands and knees.

"How now?" quoth the Dane. "Art for the robber camp with me?" The chief slowly rose and nodded.

All eyes now turned to the two other combats. Of the three vikings, the most expedient and dangerous was he who had chosen Oliver. From the beginning he seemed aware that the metal of his opponent's arms was vastly better than his own; also he seemed to know that brute strength would not avail against the apparent skill of Oliver. A third circumstance he guessed; to wit, that

Oliver would seek to disarm rather than to kill him. So the young viking smote warily and gave back when he felt himself being lured to some disadvantage. Once his axe reached Oliver's shoulder, although the force of the blow had been lessened by the good sword Hauteclaire.

At the beginning Oliver had thought to overcome the viking straightway, but now he, too, became wary and did not scruple to give back when he must. Meanwhile he cut to pieces his foe's shield, dented his helmet, and shore off cantels of the bronze armor.

Nothing daunted by the small wounds he had received, the sea rover manoeuvred until he saw a large stone directly back of Oliver. Forward he rushed; Oliver stepped back, stumbled, and went down. With his shield he met the viking's blow, rolled over like lightning, half rose, and with a full back-hand stroke swung Hauteclaire to the ribs of the other. The Norse warrior gave a gurgling grunt and fell. To his throat Oliver placed the point of his sword — whereat the chief of the vikings cried loudly, "Spare him; he is beaten."

The third fight, that between Caraheu and his foe, it may be said, began more tardily than the others and ceased before Oliver had done fighting. From the beginning the manner of Caraheu's antagonist had marked

him as a boastful fellow. Immediately upon obtaining permission to fight he had begun to excite himself into what is called a berserker rage. Now Caraheu, to whom this was a new thing, watched him with astonishment. The fellow frothed at the mouth, he bellowed ferociously, his face became contorted with horrible, beastly passion. With an insane howl he hurled himself at the knight. But Caraheu avoided him and at the same time severed one of the two straps securing the back of the viking's helmet. Again the maddened warrior charged, his axe falling on thin air, for no man alive was more fleet of foot than Caraheu who now set about trimming the viking's shield from his arm. Soon the buckler had become a mere useless encumbrance. The man's berserker rage slowly oozed from him, but still he pressed on with mad cries until Caraheu cut the second strap of his helmet which tipped forward over his eyes, thus confusing his sight.

Thereat Caraheu stepped back and said, "Remove the helm, friend, thou'lt need it no longer."

One more dash the warrior made. Caraheu crouched suddenly, and extended his foot over which the viking stumbled. Ere he could recover his balance fully, he had received a hard blow on the back with the flat of Caraheu's sword; then the knight kicked him from behind.

Flat on his face sprawled the Norseman with Caraheu on him, knee to backbone. Reaching down, the prince drew the viking's hands behind him and held him helpless, his chin buried in the gravel.

Chagrined as they were at the ill success of their three champions, the Norsemen could not help roaring with laughter at the foolish appearance of their comrade. The chief begged Carahue to let the man go.

Quoth the chief briefly, as the knights calmly picked up their purses, "Ye have won — lead on."

Soon after nightfall they sighted the camp fires of the robbers and without delay set about fashioning four bridges for throwing across the ditch. Anon the camp became quiet and the fires burned low. Then four parties were formed for the attack. They stole to the defenses, planted their bridges almost before they were discovered, and stormed into the camp which they took with a rush. But Sir Ogier, Oliver, the pirate chief, and Caraheu were the first to cross that bridge which was lowered nearest the spot where the prisoners were confined. To the captives these four cut their way and then stood guard over them.

When the fighting had died down, the chief set about restoring order. A circle of torches was stuck in the

ground and into the midst of it was cast all the spoil of the camp. Gold and silver dishes, costly fabrics, and money were found. The sea rovers began to caper about like gleeful boys. Also, they found casks of wine, but the chief would not permit these to be broached, for he knew how impossible it is to control drunken followers. The treasures were then bound into packs and placed on horses, and all set out on the path back to the ship.

The captives, all but one, had already joyfully ridden away on some of the horses that formed part of the spoils. In his arms Sir Ogier carried the fair-haired boy whose release had been the object of the expedition.

Until this moment he had felt positive that the boy would prove to be Prince Rafe, but upon taking him in his arms, doubts began to assail him. The boy seemed rather tall for any boy of eight or nine. Furthermore, the youth had borne himself throughout the battle with splendid courage; he had never flinched, but had kept his wits constantly about him. Of course the son of a king might well be tall and brave, but none the less Ogier hesitated to ask his name in the fear that he would be disappointed in the goodly triumph of returning to his home the lost prince. Nor had he yet spoken when at last they came to the dragon ship. Here fires were built on the shore, and the vikings began noisily to sort

out their booty. The three knights sat alone with the captive about a fire.

At last Ogier put his question to the boy. "Thou art — methinks thou canst be none except — are ye not Prince Rafe of Britain?"

Wonderingly the lad looked at his questioner and then to the others. "Prince Rafe? Nay, I am a girl, albeit now clad in boy's attire."

Blood rose to Ogier's head until his eyes ached. Then he laughed so bitterly that the girl shrank back from him.

"Do not be offended," he said hastily and contritely. "I had made so certain that thou were the prince that I suffered a disappointment."

Oliver patted her hand kindly, while Caraheu rose and went to the shouting Norsemen about their pile of plunder. Therefrom he selected articles of women's dress and brought them to the girl, who took them gratefully. She retired into the darkness and anon returned as no ragged boy but as a graceful lady, for she was fair of face and form and sixteen years of age.

"Lady," said Caraheu gently, "sithen thou'rt no prince, thou shalt tell us what princess we have as guest on this wild shore?"

"No princess am I," she replied smiling. "Merely a

maid, called Renolle — the daughter of Baron Bracken, a nobleman of these Netherlands.

"Baron Bracken?" mused Oliver. "Bracken? Ah, I have it. Clement Allair, the poet, whom thou didst rescue, made mention of Baron Bracken."

"Can it be," cried the girl, "that thou'rt Sir Ogier the Dane?"

"None other," smiled Caraheu. "What knowest thou of the huge fellow?"

"He it was saved Clement — now he has saved me. Methinks it a marvel!"

"So you know the poet?" said Oliver, winking at Ogier as if to say, "Here is the lady I once before whispered was loved of Clement Allair."

"I know him well," answered the girl, flushing. "He is our neighbor."

Then Oliver stooped over her hand. "Lady Renolle, all of us here love Clement Allair. At Paris Prince Caraheu and I saw him no long time ago. There is he honored of Charlemagne, the lover of learned men, 'mongst whom doth Clement rank high."

"I know," she replied softly. "It was while I was travelling to Paris that Sir Crassnor took me. My father is there."

"Then, an ye so desire, ye may go thither with Prince

Caraheu and me," said Oliver. Turning to Ogier, he asked, "Ogier, what of thee? Art, too, for Paris?"

"Nay, hither I came to rest me from the tedious cares of governance and I have found change in the stirring events of this day and night. I must return to Elsinore." He smiled ruefully.

"Forget not to tell Baldwin that he shall receive a charmed amulet to aid him in chess playing," were the farewell words of Caraheu the next morning.

CHAPTER XIX

SIR ROLAND SENDS WARNING

IN the late afternoon of a warm spring day some few knights and councillors of Denmark, all in peace attire, quietly approached the gate of Elsinore. At the head of the procession Sir Ogier sat upon his good horse, Broiffort. Many weeks had the company been journeying through the Danish provinces; their weary horses of their own accord now mended their pace for they knew they were near their stables.

Seldom these days, save for practice in arms, did Ogier don his armor, though in the first years of his life in Denmark he had always gone in warlike array and had then acquired the nickname, "Hammer of Thor." For as Thor had gone against the Storm Giants to subdue the tempest with his mighty hammer, so erstwhile had Ogier fallen on Danish insurrections or on foreign foes who had the temerity to invade his lands.

Now he rarely put on the gifts of Caraheu, but went clothed in a close-fitting suit of brown and gold satin, with a cape of soft woolen stuff falling from his shoulders. On his head sat a white leather cap from which streamed a white plume. Latterly the people had dropped the name "Hammer of Thor," for that of "Balder the Good," for Balder was the golden god of peace and beauty.

Five years had passed since Ogier had driven out the Saxons, and the land no longer lay torn with strife. Its manors had been repaired, and the peasants had built themselves good houses. Stretches of grain ripened in the sun; now no man need guard himself against his neighbor nor fear that an armed band of tax gatherers would swoop down to demand the fruits of a year's labor in the name of the law. Outlanders had learned in these five years that in Denmark a man might toil in peace; whence many new people had come to subdue the wild lands and make them bloom. Strong and ready stood the armies of Denmark, and no noble dared oppress his retainers. When the golden-brown clad knight passed through their midst, the people verily believed the air became softer and the corn ripened faster. And the coffers of Denmark's treasury had at last become filled with gold.

Now as soon as Sir Ogier had entered Elsinore on this day of spring, he repaired to a balcony of his palace overlooking the trim patterns of the ducal garden. In the glow of the setting sun he felt content; Baldwin's head rested on his shoulder.

"See!" cried the boy, excitedly unrolling a long scroll. "See, King Arthur and his knights and ladies! And combats, too! Sir Oliver sent me this."

Then an attendant entered with a letter which Ogier read with such abstraction that Baldwin cried pettishly, "The foul fiends take that letter! Thou hast but come and already am I forgotten."

Smiling the Dane replied, "What say you to a journey to Paris with me, to France where King Charlemagne holds court? There in sooth thou'lt behold knights and tourneys nigh equal to old King Arthur's."

"Oh!" cried the boy. "Oh!"

"Now go and seek out Duke Guyon and bid him come hither."

Away ran the boy, while Ogier again read the letter in his hand.

Anon came Duke Guyon, and to him Ogier silently passed the missive.

"Ay," exclaimed Guyon uneasily, "but Charlemagne hath said . . . "

"Leave us for the nonce," interrupted Ogier to Baldwin. "Go, but fear not to be disappointed. Thou shalt go to France."

"The writer of this is Sir Roland," continued Guyon. "Him we cannot mistrust."

"No, 'tis a friendly warning, written — so Roland says — in concurrence with the advices of Duke Naymes, Sir Turpin, and other well-wishers. In sooth I fear we have been overly careless, since we know Prince Charlot still hates me and foments doubts in his father's mind. One of us two had done well long ago to have gone in person to render homage and tribute to the King."

"Tribute we have sent each year," protested Guyon.

"True, but not in full, albeit it was agreed that only some part should be paid when I represented to Charlemagne how wretched was Denmark's state. Latterly it hath become known that we are prospering, whence has the King lent ear to Charlot's whispers that I am preparing to revolt. 'Twere well that I now go to France bearing full tribute; thus will suspicion be allayed."

"But what of Denmark during thine absence?" said Guyon restlessly.

"Denmark? Why Denmark hath a Duke to guard her weal," replied Sir Ogier in kindly mockery.

"Ay, while ye are near to stead me, the Duke doth well enough, but men know that thou art the rightful duke and do in sooth rule the realm, albeit I wear the crown."

Then Ogier comforted his younger brother with advice and encouragement. "If oppressors arise, I shall return," he concluded.

Finally he stood up, looked solemnly into the sunset and said, "No fears concerning Denmark haunt me, but I tell thee I fear for myself. That dastardly offspring of a noble sire, Prince Charlot, some day may set his father 'gainst me and mine beyond mending. With these hands of mine I could crush the wine-soaked mischief-maker, but still I fear him. E'en more I mistrust some harm may befall Baldwin. I spoke hastily when I promised the stripling he might go to France." For a moment the tall knight paused. Then he spoke more cheerfully. "Howbeit these be witless forebodings. All shall be well. I shall look to myself, and let any one beware who seeks to grieve Baldwin."

CHAPTER XX

THE STORY OF LADY RENOLLE

TWO days' ride from the lands of Baron Bracken, whose daughter Ogier, Oliver, and Caraheu had rescued from robbers, lay a large, friendly inn called the Fleeing Hare. By wayfarers the host of the Fleeing Hare was known as an honest man, one with a fine care for the comfort of his guests. And now ten warriors were approaching that inn on small, stocky horses. All of the riders were short of stature, but strong and mostly black of hair; their bronze arms and crude, gaudy trappings marked them as barbarians. Descendants they were of those Huns who had formerly poured into Europe from Asia and spread such horror that their leader Attila, had been dubbed the "Scourge of God."

Attila had long since passed away and the power of the Huns was so broken that their name was no longer terrible but merely abhorrent. They now dwelt in the

north and east of Europe and of late had been approached by the Saxons who sought their help in making war on Charlemagne. Before the Huns acted on this, however, they sent a seemingly friendly embassy to Paris to look about and see what manner of men the Franks were.

This deputation it was which now drew near to the Fleeing Hare. They had been to Paris and were returning to their own country. Fierce resentment smoldered in their breasts, both against the Saxons who had sought to lure them into a hopeless conflict and against the Franks. The King himself had treated them courteously, but others about the court could not brook their proud, uncouth, barbarous manners and had looked upon the Huns with unconcealed scorn.

"Our friends, the Saxons," laughed the leader of the Huns, "belike shall batter their heads 'gainst those iron men we have seen. But no man of mine shall fight amongst them."

"Nathless, we shall do well to speak the Saxons fair till we be safe in our own lands," said a warrior riding beside the chief.

"The devil take them!" exclaimed the leader fiercely. "We have come far only to meet the scorn of those haughty French lords and now depart poorer than

we came. Poorer now, say I. Howbeit, we shall yet ride some days within the bounds of Charlemagne's domains and perchance we shall not be thus poor when we enter the Saxon forests." The others smiled evilly and greedily at the thoughts his words aroused.

A long wall surrounded the Fleeing Hare, a whole half of the enclosure being the site of a pleasant garden. And when the Huns had entered the gate of the inn, they saw in this garden a group of knights and ladies at their ease. Savage greed glinted in the eyes of the Huns, for this fair company seemed richly clad.

A lull fell upon the merriment of the knights and maids when the riders rode through the gate. One by one the knights, of whom there were four, entered the inn and came back clad in war gear, and the inn folk seemed uneasy in the presence of these untamed outlanders.

However, the leader of the Huns bore himself quietly and threw down a gold piece to allay suspicions. The warriors ranged themselves round a table and called for food.

"We shall eat and begone," quoth the leader, "despite the sun is setting," and his words so eased the mind of the host that when the Hun asked him concerning the company outside, he readily told him that one of the

maids was the daughter of a great lord. She and her companions, he said, were waiting at the inn for the coming of her affianced husband who would arrive the next day, and then all together they would go to Paris where the marriage would be held in the presence of the King.

The barbarians gulped their food and departed into the twilight. The Knights took off their armor and all once more felt secure. But the Huns rode a little way only before entering the forest where they sat earnestly talking until midnight.

Now it chanced that Ogier the Dane on that self-same day hastened with five tall Danish knights and the youth, Baldwin, toward that same inn wherein the Huns had seen the maidens. Darkness fell, but still the Danes had not yet sighted the hostel, nor were they sure of the distance they still must travel to it. Hence they dismounted and slept beside the road until two hours before dawn, when they rose and continued on.

A second letter, received by Sir Ogier, just before departing from Elsinore, had caused him to make all speed. Clement Allair, the poet, had sent the letter, and each word of it breathed triumph and happiness. Thus wrote the scholar and singer:

"An ye will fly on thy way with such speed as will

bring you to an inn, called the Fleeing Hare, on the fourteenth day of June, then will my happiness be crowned with a final wreath of joy.

"For thou must know that since we met my cup of life hath overflowed with wines of delight. Charlemagne, following the pleas of Sir Roland and Sir Oliver, called me to his side, and there have I advanced in his esteem until in my behoof he did prevail upon Lord Bracken to accept me as a favored suitor of his daughter, Lady Renolle. Her have ye seen, whence no need to tell how sweet she is. Great nobles have sought her hand, but she hath given it me, a lowly gentleman.

"At the Fleeing Hare, shall I meet her and thence to Paris where we shall be wed. No greater bliss may befall a mortal than shall be mine on that kindly fourteenth day of June in that friendly inn. Nathless, it were not quite perfection except thou, Sir Ogier, preserver of my loved one and of me, be there."

At last as they rode in the dim dawn, the Danes caught sight of smoke — overly much smoke they thought. They set spurs and soon came to the Fleeing Hare. Within the yard men and women were fighting flames which burned here and there on the buildings. The ground

lay strewn with a confusion of packsaddles and all manner of wreckage — and dead men some few. So intent were all upon extinguishing the fire that they did not notice the arrival of the knights.

"What hath befallen?" cried Ogier, seizing a lad carrying a bucket.

The boy stared and mumbled, "Robbers, barbarians. They came and went and came again in the night. The ladies they took; their knights be dead in their beds."

"Which way went the robbers and when?"

"Thither they went, scarce an hour ago. Will ye follow?"

"Yea." Ogier lept to his horse, and like a monkey the boy climbed up behind him.

"Take me," he said. "I am forest-born and can follow tracks of man or beast."

At a gallop the six Danish knights rode into the brightening morn. Baldwin had been commanded to wait at the inn. Meanwhile the inn boy kept his eyes glued to the road and cried, "Haste, they ride but slowly."

For an hour they so rode until the lad jerked Broiffort's rein, thus turning him into the woods where the trail showed plainly. Suddenly the boy threw himself to the ground and listened intently. "They are near," he said. "Dismount and follow quietly." And presently

they came to the edge of a glade where a fearful sight smote their eyes. And just as they came to where those within the glade could be seen, a clear, girlish voice cried out, "Fear naught: thrust!" And even as she cried, Ogier saw the leader of the Huns, who seemed to have been wavering in doubt, thrust strongly with his sword straight into the bared bosom of Lady Renolle who stood dauntlessly before him.

Shrieks arose from seven maidens who also were there, for Lady Renolle sank to the ground, a great wound in her breast gushing blood. But then, strange to say, the Hun who had done the murder and all his men stood as if amazed at the result of the deadly stroke.

With a mighty groan of despair Ogier darted forward, Courtain in hand. Courtain flashed, and the murderer's head lept from his trunk. Then Sir Ogier knelt beside the maid, while his knights fell upon the Huns and followed them fleeing until every one was dead.

When they returned, they found their leader supporting the stricken girl, but the life blood of Lady Renolle had drained from her heart.

Scarce a word spoke man or maid on the slow return to the inn. Ogier carried the lovely girl in his arms and sometimes his great frame shook with sobs. The maidens wept softly except when one would scream suddenly with

the agony of her thoughts. The Danish knights stared straight before them with harassed eyes. Ogier had told them how Clement Allair, the poet, would that same day come to the inn to claim his bride. All dreaded to meet him. Each one of them was recalling how, during the journey from Denmark, he himself had sometimes delayed their progress a little while. "The burden of guilt is mine," said each one to himself, "sithen I caused delay."

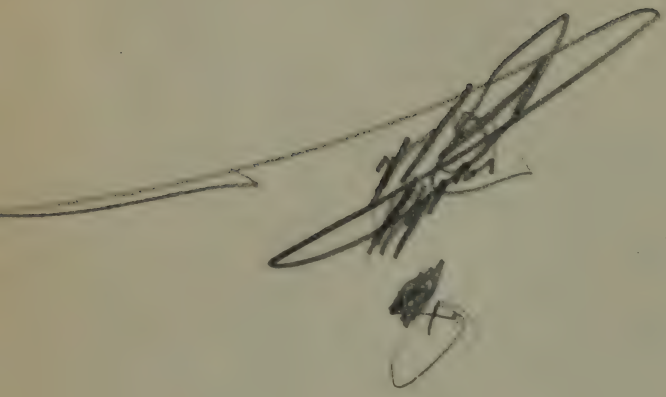
The inn folk had suppressed the flames by the time the sad procession filed into the gate. The dead had been removed and some semblance of order restored. The stricken lady was laid on a couch and covered with white draperies.

Suddenly they all cringed as if they heard the approach of death. A steed clattered into the yard; a cheery voice called out, "What ho! Where be ye all?" and Clement Allair burst into their midst.

In a very palsy of guilt, which he somehow believed to be his, Ogier shrank against a wall.

For an instant the poet looked about wonderingly. Then his eyes fell on the couch where Lady Renolle lay. For an instant he glanced anxiously at the others and then as if irresistibly impelled against his will, he hesitantly lifted the pall from her face. A dreadful twisting

A CHEERY VOICE CALLED, "WHAT HO!"



of lips deformed the features of the scholar; then he crouched, drew his dagger, and like a beast sprang at Ogier.

"Ye have permitted this!" he cried. And perhaps he would have slain the knight, who found himself incapable of defense, had not two of the Danes seized and withheld the maddened poet. Then Clement Allair trembled as with an ague and at last whispered, "Speak, ere I go mad."

Thereupon one of the damsels knelt before the unhappy man, saying, "It was the will of God and the fault of none here. To this inn we came to bide thy coming, and yestern eve came ten barbarians whom we feared. But they departed quietly and were forgotten, until last night they stole into this inn, slew our knights in their beds, and seized us maidens, along with all our wealth.

"They put us in their midst on horses and spake foul, taunting words to us as we rode. We longed for death since we could foresee naught save dishonor.

"Howbeit, e'en in our distress we others wondered to see what Lady Renolle did. We wept and abandoned ourselves to despair, but she remained blithe and spoke the leader fair and friendly. Anon we heard her making pretense of being wise in witchcraft. I heard her say with seeming confidence that, an he would do her bid-

ding, she would work him great advantage. To wit, that if he would tarry in a meadow beside a stream, she would compound a magic lotion which would render invulnerable to any weapon whoever should rub himself with it.

"The barbarian believed her. In short we came to a meadow, and there she went among the growing things and gathered herbs. Us maidens she placed before her in a row and to each gave a sprig with berries on it and whispered as she passed, 'The deadly nightshade. Who eats of it, dies.'

"Then we knew she had wrought to save us from shame. She held a pot over a flame until it boiled and into it she squeezed plant juices, and from the hair of each of us she cut a lock and held them in the flame. The shrivelled hairs she also threw into the admixture, all the while breathing soft words and waving spells. When all was done she spoke to the chief.

" 'Perchance ye doubt the potency of this lotion, but I shall prove its worth. Mine own bosom shall I first bathe in it, and then ye shall thrust at my breast with thy blade and the steel shall do me no hurt.' "

The lady who was telling the tale sobbed a moment before she could continue to its close.

"At length the barbarian did thrust, just as Sir Ogier

and his knights came — too late to save our gentle lady but in time to preserve us others. So she died that we might live."

As her words ceased, the poet raised his hands and eyes to heaven. "Hearten me, O God," he said, "for I stand in greatest need."

Gently he continued to the others. "Prepare her dear remains to go to Paris where her father and mother wait . . . Now I must be alone to think and pray." He bowed his head and walked into the forest.

That same day a mournful cortege followed the litter of Lady Renolle on its way toward Paris, but of all the sad company the least downcast seemed Clement Allair, who manfully suppressed his grief in the presence of others.

At Paris the great King wept to hear the tale and with all ceremony buried Lady Renolle in his own chapel where she was placed in a vault. And a fair marble column was erected over it whereon was carved the story of her love and bravery and death.

Good may follow disaster, and surely Lady Renolle died not in vain, for her story has lived. And perhaps had she not died, Clement Allair would not have become the greatest poet of his time. Of her and love he sang. . . . The world listened and became gentler.

CHAPTER XXI

AN EMBASSY FROM HARUN-AL-RASHID

PERHAPS never in the whole history of mankind have two such towering monarchs arisen at the same time as Harun-Al-Rashid, Caliph of Bagdad, and Charlemagne, the Frank. No rulers ever strove more tirelessly than they for the welfare of their peoples, and, inasmuch as their lands lay far apart, no cause for enmity rose to disturb the esteem and admiration which each sovereign had conceived for the other.

Now it happened that about the time of Lady Renolle's death, word came of a deputation from Caliph Harun which would shortly arrive at Paris. Vastly honored was the French King by this courtesy of the mighty Persian potentate whose ambassadors, Charlemagne knew, would bear rare and costly presents. Far more pleasing, however, was the knowledge that amongst this deputation would be wise and learned scholars. At that

time the subjects of Harun far outstripped any westerners in mathematical lore, astronomy, and other branches of learning. So Charlemagne, the eager learner, determined to receive them royally and began to cast about for means of entertaining the noble orientals. No mean tale should they take back to Harun concerning the brilliance and power of the Frankish state.

But on the heels of the above stimulating news came the sobering report that Count Berard of Peronne, one of the twelve peers of the realm, had died. A wise and loyal counsellor had been Sir Berard and a fearless leader; his loss proved a severe blow. A heavy matter was the death of a peer of France for on the shoulders of those twelve paladins rested the weight of empire.

Despite all cares of government and his grief over the deaths of Lady Renolle and Sir Berard, the great King received Sir Ogier with affection and praise. The honest rendering of Denmark's tribute finally composed all differences between them and silenced the tongues of Ogier's detractors.

"Youth Ogier," quoth Charlemagne, "many tongues have told me how thou didst rout the Saxons and how since then peace hath healed the most of Denmark's sores; also, that thou hast proven thyself an able commander in war and hast won the affections of thy people.

But also methinks I have heard some mention that ye have given new laws to the land? Is this so?"

"I have, Sire, with the aid of Councillors. For five years we labored and now the task is complete — as complete as such endless tasks can be."

"And in what esteem do the Danes hold thy code of laws?"

"Truth, Sire," laughed Ogier, "until I came, the laws of tooth and claw ruled Denmark. My laws the people have accepted gladly enough; but it must be said that the Danes be poor judges of laws, having never erst known any that were good."

The King smiled; and just at that moment Duke Naymes joined them.

"Well met, old friend," said the King. "I was wishing to see thee . . . And now, Sir Ogier, I prithee leave us, but I bid thee stay some while in Paris. Seek me when ye will without fear that I shall deem thee froward."

For two days Ogier went about renewing old acquaintances and in truth making many new ones, for the report spread that he had gained the King's favor. On the second day he chanced to be showing Baldwin the great stables attached to the palace, when the secretary of the King's councillors came to him and bade him appear in the Council Chamber.

Thither he repaired expectantly. Few people were allowed the privilege of entering that council room where the affairs of nations were discussed and decided; hence everybody was curious concerning it. Ogier had imagined it as a hall of imperial magnificence and therefore was surprised when he entered, to find it of no great size, although lofty. On two sides many tall windows reared up from high standing sills and these were heavily curtained, although now the curtains had been drawn aside to admit light. The walls and arched ceiling were dull green and altogether unembellished. A fireplace broke the plainness of one wall. Within stood a very long and heavy black table at whose head, where the King sat, was a chair somewhat larger than the others ranging down the sides. In his place sat the King, and to right and left down the table were the peers of France, and at the lower end, the secretary with his scriveners. Nor were the paladins richly dressed; rather they wore simple gowns of sober hues. In somber silence they regarded the Dane as he bowed to the King.

Through Ogier passed a wave of awe and humility, for there at table with the great King were Duke Naymes, Sir Turpin, the haughty, brilliant, bold Count Ganelon of Mayence — he who afterwards proved traitor, valiant Guy of Bourgogne, Regnier of Vienna,

and Renaud, the deadly knight of Montalban. Five more there were, all peers of the realm and men of greatest renown. Here before Ogier were gathered the paladins of France, the most honored and powerful brotherhood in the world.

With no delay the King spoke.

"Sir Ogier, ye know that ten days hence shall arrive the imperial embassy of Harun of Bagdad. Such is my esteem for the great Caliph that I am resolved his ambassadors shall be royally received and entertained.

"Also, ye have heard that Sir Berard is no more, and that thus is left a gap mongst the peers of France.

"Now the ordainment of a paladin of France marks the occasion of greater pomp than any other save a coronation. Wherefore it has been decided to fill the place of Sir Berard while the lords of Persia be here to see.

"And thy summons hither, Sir Ogier the Dane, is the first step in thine ordainment as peer of France."

Ogier felt the blood rush to his head and eyes. What had he heard? He to become a paladin of France? He to receive the greatest honor that Charlemagne had to bestow upon a subject — the secret ambition of every noble youth and man in Europe? Why, not even Roland and Oliver had as yet been ordained peers. He must have misunderstood.

Continued the King, reading the young man's thoughts. "Ay, 'tis an honor, but a heavy one — an honor involving care, toil and danger. No man ought accept it if he be fearful of heavy responsibilities. Wherefore I now demand of thee, Prince of Denmark, whether or no thou car'st to make one of us."

"Sire . . . Sire." Some obstacle had gathered in his throat. "Sire, I . . . I do."

A suppressed smile swept round the table, and then all the peers suddenly rose to their feet, stretched out their arms toward Ogier, and in unison shouted fiercely, "Art bold, just, and wise?"

Before the shock of their accusing eyes and words Ogier quailed and felt like a cringing sneaksby, caught in some petty theft. Recovering courage he replied, "Bold I believe I am and just. As for wisdom — if I have none, why am I here?"

Abruptly they all took seat again, and the King said briefly, "Sir knight, report to the palace marshal for instructions."

Dazedly, Ogier lurched from the King's presence and stumbled through the palace heedless of whom and what he saw. Rumor, however, went before him. By the magic that controls rumors, the report of what had taken place in the council chamber had already been spread abroad.

"The new peer," whispered those he passed, and from that time forward it seemed to him that every man became his friend. A few years before at that same court he had been a lonesome boy, scorned or unnoticed: now none so high but sought him out.

Even Prince Charlot came with words so fair that Ogier forgot his erstwhile fears and suspicions, in the belief that some new and better spirit must have entered into the prince. Such peace and joy as he had never known settled upon him, now that his last enemy seemed to have capitulated.

With the marshal of the palace he spent many hours while learning and rehearsing his part in the coming ceremonies. The first of these was to lead a party of knights in a tournament. This he later did with such success as to unhorse with his own hands the last knight of the other party. The day following the tournament he must break three spears with a chosen opponent — which honor was given to a young paynim knight, Sir Medoro, who at that time chanced to be a visitor in Paris. In point of skill the gallant Saracen knight proved Ogier's equal, albeit he was smaller in size. The first course gained advantage for neither, both remaining seated, splintered lances in hand. In the next course the paynim's horse went down before the heavier weight of the northern

knight, but Sir Medoro kept his saddle until forced to leave it by his struggling horse. Then Ogier's squire brought Broiffort, whom the Dane had not hitherto ridden and a lance of straightest grain. Whereupon Ogier made sure of unhorsing Sir Medoro, but at the last instant before the shock — for some reason which he himself hardly understood — he cast down his spear and caught the other's point on his shield, where it shattered harmlessly. A great cheer greeted his exploit. The onlookers seemed to deem it a courteous act, for which Ogier felt grateful. For a moment he had feared his deed might have been looked upon as an act of ostentatious self confidence.

Thousands of ladies, knights, and their followers having gathered for the ordainment, gay parades and pageants were staged by day. At night every castle glowed with light and sounded with minstrelsy and merrymaking; the dark streets twinkled with the torches and lanterns of servants accompanying their betters hither and yon.

The embassy from Bagdad rode to a hunting party. They were entertained also by a mock battle where horsemen, foot soldiers, and archers manoeuvred skilfully. But upon beholding the French engines of war for storming walls, one of the Persians diffidently

pointed out to Charlemagne wherein these might be improved. Another of them displayed to the appreciative monarch plans for stronger castles than any in his lands. Another made for him an oil lamp which shone more truly than the lamps of Paris. Yet that which most pleased the King was to learn from his visitors an improved method of smelting iron ore.

For two days, as part of the ritual, Sir Ogier sat as judge in a court to which any one might come for the settlement of his difficulties. Some few of the poorer people did lay grievances before Ogier, and these he judged in all seriousness. But mostly during those two days he found himself the object of banter. The wits of Paris seized the opportunity to contrive fantastic complaints against one another, and these cases they laid before the puzzled judge, while the spectators roared.

At last one morning, all alone, he walked fully armed between lines of the populace until he came to the cathedral. Solemn music played as he strode to the altar where he knelt before Sir Turpin, the archbishop, who shrived him of his sins. And as he knelt, Charlemagne threw over him the crimson robe worn by the peers on state occasions; and then Duke Naymes placed on his head a crown of polished steel. Whereat the people cheered lustily — a new peer had come amongst them.

Baldwin, the youth, stood at the door as the colorful procession passed out, and Ogier caught a glimpse of the boy's wistful face. His heart smote him. During the past few weeks he had neglected his son, which neglect he resolved should end, now that the festivities were drawing to a close. He was becoming vastly proud of the little waif he had made his son.

From the first Baldwin had attracted favor and affection. A diffident, slender, blithe lad he was — one of those fortunate beings who command love. And at once he gained fame as a chess player. His skill he modestly attributed to the amulet given him by Prince Caraheu, but nevertheless he inspired unqualified respect. Sometimes he would play half a score of the courtiers, himself stepping quickly from table to table and outmatching them all. In truth Ogier loved him so much that he felt a kind of jealousy toward those who petted the boy.

The following few days passed quietly enough and then there came to Sir Ogier the disturbing tidings that a host of Norsemen had invaded the kingdom of Achar of Britain. With the help of Achar's neighboring kinglets, who traitorously joined themselves to the invaders, the Norsemen had worsted him in battle. He had been forced to flee to the mountains where he and a few war-

riors were defending themselves precariously. Truth to tell, the plight of King Achar disturbed the Dane far less than that of his daughter, Clarisse.

In eager haste he went to Charlemagne, suing for permission to go to Achar's assistance with a Danish army. Upon hearing this request and learning why it was Ogier sought to help King Achar, the King frowned in puzzlement.

"Not willingly, Sir Ogier, do I gainsay thy going to the rescue of thy ladylove, but in coming just at this moment ye have forestalled being summoned to my presence. I was about to inform thee of a great task to be done. My enemies are up and in the field. Sure intelligence hath come that the Saracens of Spain are preparing for war. Nor are the infidels of Spain alone in this. They have been strengthened by a hardy array of Egyptians under King Salfron, brother to that Brunamont ye slew.

"Now I may not myself go against them, for the Saxons have again broken faith and must be punished. They have once more broken their solemn covenant of peace and are attacking my towns and castles. You it is I shall send against the paynims: ye they fear — especially doth King Salfron — more than any other of my peers."

The great King paused to reflect.

"I cannot do else than command thee ride 'gainst the

Saracens. Now are ye face to face with the penalties of thy great office. As a paladin thy private affairs must be ignored when the weal of the state demands thy service. Nathless the harshness of my decree shall be something softened by promising that upon thy return from this war, ye shall have an army wherewith to invade Britain.

"This pagan threat is most serious except it be met forthwith. The worst I have not yet told, — Sultan Bruhier of Babylon thinks to sail to Spain with his warriors. And Bruhier is to be feared beyond all others of Islam. He himself, is greater than even thee in statute and is said to be a match for ten men. His warriors are fierce and countless. Wherefore, before Bruhier can sail for Spain, Salfron and the Spanish Mussulmans must be routed; else I foresee disaster.

"Meanwhile I shall send to King Achar, bidding him hold out until ye come."

CHAPTER XXII

SULTAN BRUHIER LEARNS GREAT NEWS

ON a certain day two years after Sir Ogier had been ordained peer of France, a tall, thin, old man might have been seen riding a mule along a bridle path which wound about a well tilled plateau lying north of the ancient city of Babylon.

He was garbed in Moorish attire and was making his way toward the outposts of a mighty oriental encampment which stretched far and wide over the plain. Through the encampment wound a scanty stream. The leaves of the palm trees, which grew here and there, were gray with the dust stirred up by the feet of man and beast treading the lanes between tents and pavilions.

A turbaned sentry, holding his scimitar by hilt and point, sharply halted the old man but, upon catching sight of a great signet ring held toward him, the sentry bowed profoundly and bade him pass. Unmolested from

thence on, the old rider passed through the camp to a widespread silken pavilion of black and orange. Here he approached the captain of the guardsmen ranged about the many-roomed tent and again displayed his signet ring, demanding at the same time an audience with Bruhier, Sultan of Babylon.

"Lord Achmed," quoth the captain of the guard, bowing low to the old rider, "the Sultan hath long awaited thee with impatience. Enter without ceremony."

Two black slaves parted the hangings at the pavilion entrance, but before Lord Achmed had fairly stepped inside, he was seized in eager welcome by Bruhier who in his gladness lifted the old fellow off his feet. Thereupon the giant Sultan seated his visitor on a silken couch, while he himself sat humbly before him on a stool.

"What news, old friend? I believe it good — but speak, man, speak!"

"Two years aback," began old Achmed deliberately, "when news came to us that King Salfron had fallen by the hand of Sir Ogier, the Dane . . . "

"A plague on two years aback!" cried the Sultan. "Tell me such things as I know not — not what I know only too well!"

Old Achmed paused, while his face grew stubborn. Like many another old man, he little relished interrup-

tions. However, one could not safely offend Bruhier, so Achmed swallowed his annoyance and continued.

"If I tell you straightway that Ogier the Dane is dead, then shall I be permitted mine own manner of telling the rest of the tale?"

Up sprang Bruhier and then threw himself on his knees. He bowed toward the holy city of Mecca, crying, "Allah be praised: Allah be praised!"

He then seated himself and, glowing with good humor, prepared to listen calmly, although he dreaded Achmed's deliberation. "For those good words," quoth he, "I shall sit patiently full seven days, if need be, and not once bid thee haste."

"Two years aback," repeated Achmed, "when you had here gathered your power and would have set out to stead King Salfron and the true believers of Spain, report came that this fell knight of Denmark had suddenly swept down from the north, had slain the Egyptian king, and routed the Mohammedans so utterly that the strong soldiers of France had quickly overrun all Spain.

"So at that time ye stayed your preparations for war, while I consulted the mystic signs of the heavens. Of them I learned that you, O great commander of the faithful, had naught to fear from mortal foe, save from that same Sir Ogier, who has been a scourge to thy kinsmen.

By his hand have fallen thy cousins of Egypt, Salfron and Brunamont."

"Yea, yea — I know all this . . . " The Sultan halted his words, grinned, and clapped Achmed's knee good-naturedly. The stubborn expression had returned to the old man's face.

"I then advised that you hold your hand," continued Achmed even more slowly, "the while I, in guise of a scholar from Harun of Bagdad, made way to Paris to spy upon King Charlemagne.

"When I arrived at Paris I learned that Ogier of Denmark, the lately made peer and conqueror of Spain, had ceased to enjoy his King's favor — in short had become a fugitive from the wrath of Charlemagne, a great price having been offered for his head, be he taken dead or alive. And this is the story of the quarrel which arose between the Dane and the Frankish king.

"Having conquered Spain, Sir Ogier rode with a gallant following back to Paris. Along the way a grateful populace acclaimed him with shouts and flowers and blessings; from out the gates of Paris a guard of honor rode to meet him, and the King and the lords of the realm waited in the hall of thrones to do the hero honor in a manner befitting his deserts.

"Now perchance ye know that Charlemagne hath an

eldest son Prince Charlot, an evil man? Above all others hated he Sir Ogier the Dane."

Bruhier nodded a little impatiently, but made no remark.

"But 'tis unlikely that you have heard of Baldwin, a waif whom Sir Ogier adopted?"

The Sultan shook his head.

"Well, when the Dane returned from Spain, Baldwin had seen some ten or twelve winters. Much beloved he was by the courtiers and famed for his skill in chess. But Charlot loved him not and on that day of Sir Ogier's triumphant return, having drunk of wine until he became coarse and quarrelsome, the Prince entered the palace just ere Ogier came. There he spied Baldwin near a table with chessmen arrayed upon it. For a moment Charlot stood evilly regarding Baldwin and then spoke harshly.

" 'Ye that stand there — Baldwin, so-called son of Sir Ogier — I have heard thou'rt possessed of an overweening pride of skill in chess playing. Now take seat and play with me and learn modesty.'

"The Prince, flushed with strong drink, threw himself loosely into a seat beside the chess table, and Baldwin seated himself, albeit unwilling to play at that time.

"They played a game, the prince growing more and

more insulting. Speedily checkmated by the boy, he flew into a rage and sent a servant for his own chessboard and men, shouting aloud that those they had just played with were cheats. A mild lad was Baldwin but haughty when provoked. He thought to refuse to play, but the courtiers about urged him to proceed.

"The chessboard of the prince came — a heavy thing of gold. Again they played, and again the boy won as easily as before."

" 'Nameless waif! Son of nobody!' howled the prince, lifting in his rage the heavy gold chessboard. With a sharp edge of it he struck Baldwin's uncovered head.

"Down fell the boy. All about stood motionless in fear — all save a British knight who chanced at that time to be in Paris. Before any other there moved or spoke, this British knight stooped and tore open the boy's tunic and listened at his heart."

Old Achmed paused and gazed dreamily at the folds of the pavilion roof.

"Proceed," quoth the Sultan who, in spite of his impatience, had become interested in the tale. "What then?"

"Mark you carefully," resumed Achmed, "that the man who placed his ear 'gainst Baldwin's heart was a Briton. Mayhap on the boy's breast that Briton saw a

scar or birthmark — I know not. But when he rose, his eyes flamed with excitement. 'Dead,' he murmured. 'Rafe — King Achar's son — dead.'

"Now commonly his words would have been heard by all those of the company standing near, but as matters fell out, only one of them caught any of the words save the one, 'dead.' And the one who did hear all the Briton said chanced to be a courtier to whom later I happened to be of service and he told me of the occurrence. The Briton, it seems, immediately fled the court, having made no mention of his discovery.

"But you, Sir Sultan, will wonder why only one courtier heard the words of the Briton. 'Twas because at the instant that the Briton spoke Ogier the Dane entered the hall where Baldwin lay. The Dane too had heard the word 'dead.' He also saw Charlot trembling with guilt and terror.

"Terrible became the front of the hero; his sword lept forth and the dastard, Charlot, fled before him. In his arms Sir Ogier carried his stricken son and followed to the throne room where the Prince had taken refuge behind his father. The Dane laid Baldwin on the floor and spoke in gasping accents.

" 'Sir King, yield thy son to my mercy, else I cut my way to him!'

"AGAIN THEY PLAYED, AND AGAIN THE BOY WON."

"Then waxed Charlemagne wrathful. Never erst had he been so bearded with voice and weapon.

" 'Hold thy hand, rash subject, else thou diest!'

"Thereupon the King drew his sword and the two had certainly fought had not from one side certain knights held the King and from the other side the Dane.

" 'Get thee hence!' hissed Duke Naymes to Ogier, his friend.

"Out of the palace they forced Ogier and brought him his horse Broiffort. Thus the Dane, sick with grief, fled with Baldwin's body in his arms.

"Forthwith the King, who is just and generous in all matters which concern not the base Charlot, declared Sir Ogier an outlaw, placed a price on his head, and sent soldiers on the roads to Denmark whither he made sure the Dane would fly. But in this last he mistook, for tall Ogier had no desire fatally to embroil his people with the might of Charlemagne. He went south — not north. All that day and into the night the gallant horse Broiffort sped swiftly under his double burden, and at last — so runs the tale as told to me — Sir Ogier buried Baldwin, scooping with sword and fingers a hole in the earth at a place where the road branched at the top of a hill. On the mound over the boy he placed a block of wood whereon he scratched with dagger point the boy's

story and begged some kind soul to there erect a stone.

"Then to Didier, the Lombard King, came Ogier at a time when the Lombards chanced to be hard pressed by the Duke of Milan. Heaven sent seemed Sir Ogier to King Didier. Straightway was the Dane given command of the Lombard warriors and straightway crushed the Milanese.

"Anon Charlemagne learned what was toward and sent to demand that King Didier surrender his guest and captain. But Didier, an unstable man, deemed himself now able to defy the French King. Sir Ogier warned him to have a care and offered to betake himself elsewhere, but Didier, nothing heeding, bade Charlemagne attend his own affairs.

"Thereat a Frankish army appeared in Lombardy and the 'iron men' were not to be stayed despite all that the tall Dane could do. Then Didier thought to save himself by giving up the Dane and this he had certainly succeeded in doing, had not Sir Ogier been warned to escape by Didier's Queen who had looked fondly on the fair-haired Dane, as had more than one woman before her. He safely reached a castle which Didier had given him, but was soon beseiged by the Franks. He again fled on his swift horse.

"Next he chanced upon a small stronghold whose inmates bade him begone but he, wroth at their churlishness, drove them forth at the sword's point and held the place alone. Anon the Franks found him, but dared not at once storm the place because Ogier fashioned from wood the semblances of men which he armed as warriors and placed on the battlements to deceive the enemy. Howbeit the Franks gathered their forces, and Ogier mounted his horse in the night and broke through the besiegers, once more a fugitive.

"He had now become rash and despondent. Despite he had done no wrong, every man's hand seemed raised against him. So he rode straight into Charlemagne's lands, thinking perchance to gain Britain. It is said he loves a British Princess. Concerning his motives, however, I am ill-informed."

"What now befell?" quoth Sultan Bruhier restlessly, for he was beginning to thirst for an end.

"He laid him down to sleep one noonday overly close to a highway where some of Charlemagne's knights spied him and bound his limbs while he slept. Nathless these knights took him unwillingly, they being friends of his and commanded by Sir Turpin, the warrior-priest. And when he had been taken before the King, Charlemagne commanded his immediate execution.

"Spake then Sir Turpin. 'Permit, Sire, that I keep him safe in my castle. My word on it that he shall not escape.' Others too besought the King to be merciful, and to them he at last yielded but only to a certain extent.

" 'Ye may keep him imprisoned on pain of thy life that he escapes not,' said the king to Sir Turpin, 'but on this condition, to wit, that he shall be given each day no more than half a loaf of bread as food and no more of drink than half a measure of wine.'

"At the words those who loved Ogier paled with dismay, sithen his size is huge, he eats hugely, and drinks deeply. Hardly can a starveling clerk subsist on such fare as the King decreed. The command spelled Sir Ogier's death warrant. But Sir Turpin bowed acquiescence and led his prisoner away.

"As you know, Sir Sultan, I was all this while in France, and there the report spread that Sir Ogier was starving for food and suffering for drink. 'Twas said he would surely die. Nor did Sir Turpin deny the tidings; the warrior-priest himself had become gaunt and careworn as with grief. Then I betook me, wishing to make sure of the truth, to an inn hard by the Dane's prison and there waited and watched. Anon, beyond peradventure, I learned that he had died. I saw his coffin

placed underground. Above it a stone now stands telling briefly Sir Ogier's tale."

Old Achmed had finished, and for a moment neither he nor the Sultan spoke.

"Strange that so good a knight should die so miserable a death," said the Sultan at last. "Despite his passing bodes well for Islam, I would he had met a nobler end."

"But I would not," quoth Achmed, "for now we may turn to Prince Caraheu with good hopes that those riders of his, whom the Franks remember well, will make one with us."

"Sooth thou sayest," cried the Sultan, rising and pacing up and down excitedly. "In truth Caraheu has held back because of a vow to do no battle 'gainst the Franks, but that oath he swore because of love for Ogier the Dane. Now will Sir Caraheu rise in wrath and with him nigh all Islam. This very hour shall embassies be despatched to India and to the Moors of Spain. On the Mediterranean shore of France shall the forces of India and Babylon be landed, while they of Spain advance from that side."

For some little while longer the Sultan spoke eagerly, while old Achmed pondered.

After a time the latter said with apparent irrele-

vance, "Ogier's son Baldwin was Prince Rafe of Britain."

"Ay, what of it?"

" 'Tis seldom such stray bits of strange knowledge may not be turned to some useful purpose . . . What say you to joining forces with King Achar, the father of the slaughtered prince?"

"King Achar?" exclaimed the Sultan. "Why, King Achar was never more than a kinglet and now he is a deposed and fugitive kinglet."

"Ay, but he hath a daughter."

"What riddle is it ye propound? Speak shortly; I have many matters to consider."

"An you should marry the daughter, Princess Clarisse, then might you go to France as avenger of thy wife's brother. 'Twould sound well in men's ears."

"Ho, ho! So it might. Think ye the matter can be arranged?"

Old Achmed smiled. "Methinks it might — one way or another."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE KING REPENTS

FOLLOWING the death of Sir Ogier, Charlemagne found himself oppressed with gloom and discontent. His affairs were beginning to fall into disorder. Roland and Oliver had departed in anger for parts unknown because of the injustice done the Dane and also because of the unendurable malice of Charlot. All of the great nobles remained reluctantly at court. Moreover, Sir Renaud, a peer and a great hero, had quarrelled with the King and now lived in exile. A disturbing rumor came from Britain that Baldwin was no other than King Achar's son. No proof of this was forthcoming, but it was generally believed. To the King's further distress a revolt lifted its head in Bavaria, the land of Duke Naymes. Thither the King and duke hurried with an army and quickly suppressed the uprising, only to be informed by a messenger from the south that Sultan

Bruhier and Caraheu had landed in the south of France and that the Saracens of Spain were preparing an advance.

At the threat of the Saracens, Charlemagne indeed regretted the passing of Sir Ogier, for the paynims feared him more than any other. But the great King, with his accustomed dauntless energy, returned to France and gathered head to meet the foe whom he found advancing with terrifying rapidity. Stories passed from hamlet to hamlet concerning the fearful prowess of Bruhier, his great stature alone being enough to palsy the French. Scarcely less terrible were the reports of Prince Caraheu's valor. Nor were the two Moslem leaders less wise in war than potent in combat, for half of France lay behind their advance lines by the time they came upon the host of Charlemagne. There the great King waited in so well chosen a position that Bruhier was forced to pause. Unfortunately Bruhier could better afford to pause than his enemy.

" 'Tis curious how each rumor set afloat by the paynims makes some mention of Sir Ogier," said Duke Naymes to Sir Turpin as the two peers sat one day looking out over their own front lines toward the camp of Caraheu and Bruhier.

"Methinks 'tis guileful rather than curious. All such reports are set afloat by wily, old Lord Achmed who well knows that certain ideas are potent to weaken men's resolution. Mention of the Dane serves to hearten the Moslems who remember the prophesies promising them success, be they unopposed by Ogier. Contrariwise, we Christians be stirred by vague fears that our present plight is the punishment of heaven for the injustice done him. Subtly hath Achmed swayed men's thoughts by mere words. First every breeze seemed to breathe the tidings that Bruhier has naught to fear from mortal foe, now that Ogier is gone. Then every man learned that Prince Caraheu has come for no other purpose than to avenge Sir Ogier, his comrade-in-arms. And of late we are hearing the strange report that King Achar will join the paynims and give his daughter, Clarisse, in marriage to Bruhier with the intent that the foul murder of his son, Rafe — the same as Ogier's adopted son, Baldwin — may be more certainly avenged . . . Now I misdoubt me that Baldwin and Rafe were one."

"Doubt it not," interrupted Duke Naymes. "It is the truth."

The two elderly warriors now sat silent for some moments.

" 'Tis said," mused Duke Naymes at last, "that Guyon

of Denmark is preparing a mighty fleet of war. Perchance that rumor, too, hath been set agoing by old Achmed?"

"He hath doubtless added to it, but it is a truth that Guyon's fleet is gathering head — for what purpose is still uncertain. Should he now descend upon the shores of France, I know not how he might be opposed."

Now while Sir Turpin and Duke Naymes were sadly conversing in the Christian camp, Caraheu, Bruhier, and old Achmed in the opposing Saracen camp were triumphantly awaiting the arrival of King Achar and Princess Clarisse who had just entered the Moslem lines for the first time. Dressed in their lordliest robes of state were the Moslem leaders. The folds of the pavilion entrance drew back and the two Britons entered hand in hand.

To them Sultan Bruhier bowed very low, first kissing the hand of the lady and then grasping Achar's hand as equal to equal.

"You and thy daughter, Sir King, I welcome as guests to be honored and respected in all ways."

As he spoke Caraheu glanced at him apprehensively — he thought that in the eyes of Bruhier he discerned something more than mere friendliness when the Sultan

gazed upon the rose and white beauty of the slender girl. Thereupon Sir Caraheu shot at the giant Sultan a look of warning.

"Fear naught, friend Caraheu," laughed Bruhier good-naturedly. "Sir King, ere ye came, Prince Caraheu exacted my promise that thou and the Princess be held in due honor. Naught need ye fear from me or any in this camp; thou hast my royal word for it. Nay more, ye be free to go where ye will."

"With no consent of mine," quoth King Achar, "was I led hither, albeit I will say that we have suffered neither insult nor discomfort. But why I am here I know not, nor what ye mean by saying I may go where I will. If I truly am not to be constrained, shall I not betake me to Charlemagne, sithen I am a Christian?"

Bruhier smiled. "Belike you may — I shall nowise gainsay your going — but here art thou a royal guest. In the Frankish camp thou shalt bow to Charlot, murderer of thy son, and to Charlemagne who starved thy daughter's erstwhile lover, he who had purposed coming to thine aid. Sir," continued the Sultan turning to an attendant officer, "lead these royal guests to their pavilion and on thy head see that they be nowise displeased."

When the Britons had been escorted away, old Ach-

med said, knowingly. "When the word goes forth that Clarisse hath married thee, it shall be believed, despite it will be false. And whether Achar sides with us or not, the Franks will credit the tale that he hath come hither to avenge his son."

Thereupon Achmed drew to him Bruhier and Caraheu and proposed a plan which caused the two monarchs to laugh with boyish glee. Two envoys were called immediately and given messages to be delivered to Charlemagne.

Within an hour the first of the two envoys bowed before the French king where he sat amidst his councillors. The envoy bowed humbly, but he spoke with a touch of arrogance.

"Great Christian emperor, I am come from Sultan Bruhier of Babylon, bearing his gage of battle. There it lies." He drew out a mighty gauntlet and cast it at the feet of Charlot who shrank back nervously.

"To Prince Charlot or to any knight who would champion the prince, my master addresses his challenge. Sir Bruhier is thus challenging that he may redress the wrong of his wife, Princess Clarisse of Britain. She charges that Prince Rafe, her brother, was maliciously murdered by Prince Charlot."

The envoy became silent and waited. None of the

Franks spoke and anon the envoy, with no little contempt, picked up the gauntlet and departed.

Hardly had he gone than the second envoy came — this one being from Caraheu of India. And this envoy cast a glove at the feet of Charlot, saying, "Sir Prince, ye wantonly murdered the helpless son of Sir Ogier, the Dane. Following which dastard crime, thou and thy father did cruelly do to death the Dane himself. To thee, therefore, Caraheu of India casts his gage, sith he and Sir Ogier were sworn brothers-in-arms."

For a time the glove lay untouched, for Charlot dared not fight and no others would espouse his cause. Thereupon the second envoy picked up his gage and disdainfully went his way.

The next day Sir Bruhier, speaking through a third messenger, offered to prove on the person of any knight of France that the warriors of Islam were hardier than those of the west. This challenge was taken up by a strong knight who fought Bruhier and was overcome by him.

As a final insult the Sultan sent an ambassador who addressed Charlemagne at length as follows, "My master, the Sultan of Babylon, bids you reflect that while your power is waning, his is waxing. Even now you dare not oppose him in open battle, despite the True

Believers of Spain have not yet joined him. And Guyon of Denmark is preparing to sweep your ships from the sea, and the Saxons are beginning to invade thy northern provinces.

"Howbeit, despite his advantage, Sir Bruhier will meet in combat any champion chosen by thee, with the condition that, should he prevail over thy champion, a line shall be drawn from east to west across France passing through Orleans — all the lands south of that line to be Bruhier's and Caraheu's and all north, thine. But if thy champion prevails, Sir Bruhier and Sir Caraheu will straightway depart with all their men to their own lands.

"To this pact will the monarchs, Bruhier and Caraheu, set their seals, albeit the Moslems stand to lose much and gain little, sith already they hold most of the land south of Orleans."

"Return to thy master," replied Charlemagne, "and say that I shall consider the proposal and shall send an answer in no long time."

But when the ambassador had gone, the whitening head of the great King sank to his breast, and all his lords looked upon him in pity.

Said Duke Naymes at last, " 'Tis sad that Roland, Oliver, and Renaud be gone. Methinks any one of them

might match the Sultan, but other than they, I know of none we dare set against him."

The king replied sadly, "I fear me that with a chessboard Charlot struck down France when Baldwin fell. 'Tis the Dane the paynim feared. Would he were now here! May God allow that sometime I meet that noble knight in heaven and crave his forgiveness!" He sighed deeply.

With shining eyes Sir Turpin then spoke eagerly, "In truth, Sire, each man here believes you wronged the Dane and we rejoice to hear thou hast repented of his death. But, Sire, if you should meet him ere you go to heaven, would it be in wrath or penitence?"

"In earth or heaven, what matter? I would confess my fault."

With half closed eyes the King looked to the ground and therefore did not see Sir Turpin hastily leave the tent and return with a tall, black-robed, cowled figure who strode to the King and regarded him defiantly.

Anon the King looked up and saw the mysterious man before him. "Who be ye who thus refuse me all customary salutation?"

In answer the black-robed stranger threw back his cowl, and the King found himself staring into the calm but bitter eyes of Sir Ogier the Dane.

From his seat lept Charlemagne and would have embraced the knight, had not Ogier repelled him with such a look of hate that the King recoiled. Those about stood tongue-tied as if they were beholding a miracle, for Sir Ogier seemed neither thin nor weakened, but as strong as of old. Yet he carried himself as if he stood among enemies.

"Wherefore am I brought hither?" he demanded coldly.

"Ask that of some other," replied the King. "I deemed thee dead. Heaven, perchance, brought thee at this moment when our need of thee is most great."

" 'Tis no miracle that he is here," said Sir Turpin. "It has come about thus. Ye commanded that I hold Sir Ogier safe and sustain him on half a loaf and half a measure of wine each day. And so I fed him. Howbeit I made me a bread form so huge that a half of it will suffice three men; and a wine measure of such size was fashioned that when half filled, a strong man may barely lift it to his lips. About my castle Sir Ogier has roamed at will, he having given a pledge not to escape. He has maintained practice in arms. I reported him dead that my stratagem might not be discovered."

"Nathless, 'tis a miracle that he hath come in time to deliver Christendom.

THE BLACK-ROBED STRANGER THREW BACK HIS COWL.

"Sir Ogier of Denmark," continued the King, "I confess I have wronged thee and I humbly sue for pardon. Ye served France well and were ill repaid, but now again France, her king, and all Christendom beg you to smite in their behoof. Ye alone may conquer Bruhier in combat and thus save Europe from the pagan host."

"Dost remember, King, when my father's envoy knelt and begged aid of thee?" quoth the Dane with a bitter sneer. "What ye then told him, I now tell thee. Ye are mad to call upon me to stead thee."

Thereupon Ogier's friends besought him to consider how the King had repented and how desperate was the plight of Christendom. He shook them off and continued, with cold eyes fixed upon the King.

"Yet will I fight the Sultan of Babylon — on one condition, to wit, that a sword be placed in my hand and that Charlot be placed before me within reach of that sword. Thereafter shall I match me 'gainst the paynim."

"So ye would slay my eldest son? Will not some other demand content thy bitterness?" The King could not withhold a gasping sob.

"My last word hath been spoken."

"Sire," begged Duke Naymes, "then must Charlot be yielded up to him. Charlot hath brought about this ruin. Let him suffer for it!"

With a great effort the King replied calmly. "Give Sir Ogier a sword and fetch the prince."

A dread silence followed, each waiting for some other to go and bring the prince. Then Sir Turpin departed. He, who knew Ogier well, felt confident that the Dane would only frighten and humiliate the Prince rather than slay him. But as the others stood there uncertainly, a knight who had entered unnoticed and theretofore had stood trembling, kneeled before the King and spoke solemnly.

"Sire, Prince Charlot is dead. Huon of Bordeaux, a good youth and mighty, slew him in self defense. The dead Prince will be borne hither on the morrow."

"Ho! Am I one to be beguiled by such open trickery?" laughed Ogier. "Nay, I am not so easily duped as once I was."

" 'Tis no trickery!" cried Duke Naymes, but Sir Ogier smiled disbelief.

"Bring me the living prince or I take upon me no combat."

Now it happens sometimes that in the midst of events which scorch the very soul, a man's thought will wander to matters of no importance. And so it was with Charlemagne whose thoughts flitted from this to that until he remembered that Ogier had once confided his love for

Princess Clarisse of Britain. A forlorn hope began to stir within the King. He spoke sadly.

"I grieve, Sir Ogier, that ye so utterly distrust my word, for in sooth the report of Charlot's death comes as unexpectedly to me as to thee. If he lived, I would yield him to thy mercy and then mightst thou fight Bruhier. But I cannot yield him and so all Christendom shall mourn. Yea, all Christendom . . . and Princess Clarisse who now is in Bruhier's power and, once her usefulness to the swart Sultan has come to an end, shall she not suffer shame or death?"

Outwardly unmoved, Ogier turned to Duke Naymes, saying, "Speaks he true?"

"Yea, he speaks truth," cried the Duke.

Then quietly amidst a tense hush the Dane spoke. "Bring my horse Broiffort, my sword Courtain, and all my other arms. Within the hour I shall meet Bruhier, an he will have it so."

A cheer rang out and before he could be stayed, the King had embraced the champion, and the other lords crowded about rejoicing. In the face of their good will all coldness melted away from Ogier's heart. In truth he was overjoyed to become again the comrade of these men whom he loved.

CHAPTER XXIV

COURTAIN SINGS AGAIN

BEFORE a pavilion in the paynim camp Prince Caraheu and Sultan Bruhier sat listening to the cheers which kept resounding here and there in the Christian camp.

"That Charlemagne hath so quickly determined upon a champion comes as a surprise," said Bruhier. "I wonder whom he has chosen?"

"Belike Sir Oliver, or Sir Roland, or Sir Renaud hath returned unheralded," replied Caraheu. "See, how they crowd to the high places to behold the coming combat!"

"Roland, Oliver, or any other — I care not," said Bruhier. "Ogier is dead."

Attendants now came to arm the Sultan and when he was ready, he and Caraheu rode to meet two French knights who had emerged from the Frankish lines.

"He carries a huge lance," remarked Caraheu. "A large man he is."

"Too cumbersome is that spear for any living knight," returned Bruhier. Then he looked about uncomfortably. "Faugh, a brooding day is this — the low-hanging clouds, the moaning wind. Look you — this scene, despite it is filled with men, seems lonesome, bleak, threatening."

"The quarterings on his shield!" exclaimed the Indian Prince suddenly. "Methinks 'tis the device of Sir Ogier. In truth it is!" The prince continued wrathfully. "Some caitiff has dared despoil the Dane of his arms. By the Prophet! He wears the arms that once I wore and he rides Broiffort. Kill the dastard, Sir Bruhier. Spare him not. Would I were to fight him! The arms I gave to Ogier would then be mine again."

"Ye shall have the arms, but I shall take the horse, Broiffort. I have long coveted him."

They halted while Caraheu went to meet Sir Turpin who was steading Ogier. The two chose a fair spot for the combat and signalled for it to begin. The two champions lowered lances and came on.

Swiftly Broiffort skimmed the ground toward the slower steed of the paynim giant. Then, as he had been trained to do at the touch of his master's rein, he swerved a little before the shock; a very little he swerved, but enough so that Bruhier's lance missed, while Ogier's

mighty, iron-banded spear struck the other's shield and bore him to the earth.

Tensely the paynims watched to see whether or no he would arise. One of his legs lay pinioned under his struggling mount. Then with amazement they saw the Frankish champion lay hold on the fallen horse and so lift him that Bruhier withdrew his leg and rose to his feet.

"How now?" quoth Ogier. "Dost yield or shall we continue on foot."

"I am unhurt," cried the Sultan. "Look to thyself."

Then Sir Bruhier struck so fearful a blow as to nigh bring his foe to his knees; the bones of Ogier's arms seemed to creak under the shock of the buffet, although he had met it with blade and shield. Courtain flashed in return, and they lashed at one another until the Dane's muscles were tired and bruised; his breath came in gasps and blood ran from wounds. Nor had Bruhier fared much better. For a time they desisted and leaned heavily on their shields.

"Sir knight," said the Sultan, "I regard thee more friendlywise than when ye came. Then methought thou wert some poltroon who had despoiled Sir Ogier of his arms, thinking thus to frighten me. Howbeit, ye seem to have borrowed the Dane's valor, along with his arms,

and ye fight generously. I am loath to slay so good a knight. Yield and thou shalt be spared."

"Why, Sir Sultan, should I not wear Sir Ogier's arms sithen I am Sir Ogier."

"Thou liest! Dead and buried is Ogier the Dane."

"Nay, employ no hard words — we are come to exchange hard blows," replied Ogier mildly. "Look you." He raised his visor and turned to Caraheu. "Do ye not recognize me, Sir Caraheu?"

For a moment Caraheu sat spellbound; then he leaned closer. At length he stammered, " 'Tis surely Ogier — alive — or do I dream?"

At these words Bruhier recoiled a pace, but anon he recovered his courage, saying boldly, "The portents of the heavens warned me to shun Sir Ogier — not that I shall die at his hands. Once again — have at thee."

Pale with anxiety now became the face of Sir Turpin as he watched that terrible onset of Bruhier; he thought the end had come and France lost. Mad cheers rang out from the paynim host; the Franks stood taut with fear.

But Courtain had not been idle. The Sultan was bleeding freely and his lungs were nigh bursting. Of a sudden the seemingly spent Dane lightly avoided the Sultan's rush, and then in truth Courtain flamed and cut nigh half in two the shield arm of Bruhier. The blood gushed

forth; a faintness came over the paynim. He rushed incontinently toward his horse, thinking to stay the flow of blood with a magic, healing unguent which hung at his saddle.

But Ogier followed close. Bruhier was forced to turn before he could possess himself of the unguent. Too late he turned, for Courtain again bit deeply where the shoulder and neck join. Down fell the giant, and his sword fell away from his trembling fingers.

And Ogier pitied him, for Bruhier had proved a gallant foe.

Quoth he, "Sir Sultan, I have no wish to slay thee, but slay thee I shall, if ye do not explain to my satisfaction the presence of Princess Clarisse of Britain in thy camp."

"Lord Achmed," gasped Bruhier, "bought the Britons for gold — they had been imprisoned. They have been treated honorably — ask them if ye doubt me."

"Is the princess wedded to thee?"

"Nay, she remains a maid."

"Then command that the two be straightway yielded to me. Do this — and live."

But Caraheu had already galloped away in search of the two Britons.

"The unguent," gasped the Sultan. "On my saddle.

THE DANE LIFTED CLARISSE TO THE SADDLE OF BROIFFORT.

Fetch it — else I die." Hastily Ogier found the unguent and applied it to Bruhier's wounds. "I am saved," sighed the giant paynim. "I thank thee. And ye may tell thy King that our pact shall be in all ways honored."

"And I shall keep my word therein," called out Caraheu, who at the moment rode up with Princess Clarisse and King Achar.

But Ogier paid neither him nor King Achar heed, for he and Clarisse were gazing into each other's eyes.

With smiling understanding Sir Caraheu, the fine gentleman, waved away those who sought to crowd around Sir Ogier.

"Let be," cried Caraheu laughingly as the Dane lifted Clarisse to the saddle of Broiffort and walked by her side.

Shyly the tall knight looked up at her and said, "Canst thou forgive me that for so many years I have proved a recreant lover? And canst thou forgive that, albeit I found thy brother, I cherished him so coldly that he was slain?"

In reply the girl placed her hand trustfully in his.

"Thy brother, dear lady, I buried with mine own hands. To that grave shall we two go together and wreathe it with flowers when Sir Turpin hath made us man and wife."

Then Sir Ogier's eyes widened in amazement. "Hark! Hear ye not a song? 'Tis Courtain singing."

"A melody I do hear," replied the princess happily. "But how should I have guessed that a sword would sing of love to a man and maid?"

END

THE SINGING SWORD

The events of this story took place several hundred years ago. It gives you an idea of how the knights of old lived. When you want to look up something special about that period, this index will help you.

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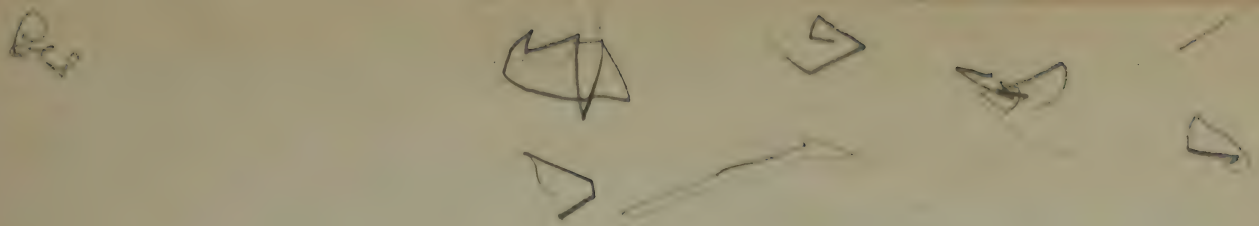
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